



# HEGEL IN A WIRED BRAIN

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B L O O M S B U R Y

# **Hegel in a Wired Brain**

*For Jela, with love.  
Nothing more, but this is enough.*

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# Hegel in a Wired Brain

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## Introduction

### “Un jour, peut-être, le siècle sera hégélien”

In 2020, we are celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Hegel. Is Hegel just a historical curiosity or does his thought still address us? “Un jour peut-être, le siècle sera Deleuzien,” Michel Foucault wrote decades ago in a review of one of Gilles Deleuze’s books. The hypothesis of the present book is that, if, in some sense, the twentieth century was not Deleuzian, but Marxian, the twenty-first century will be Hegelian. This claim cannot but appear as a display of madness – is, in our universe of quantum physics and evolutionary biology, of cognitive sciences and digitalization, of global capitalism and totalitarianism, Hegel not simply out? Our first point is not that Hegel somehow saw all this or had a premonition of it – no, he didn’t, and he knew that he could not. The Hegelian “Absolute Knowing” does not imply that Hegel “knew it all,” it stands precisely for the realization of an unsurpassable limit. Recall Hegel’s emphatic dismissal of “issuing instructions on how the world ought to be” from the “Preface” of his *Philosophy of Right*:

philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform this function. As the thought of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state ... When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.<sup>1</sup>

Robert Pippin noted the obvious (although rarely drawn) implication of this claim: it has to apply also to the notion of State deployed in his own *Philosophy of Right* – the fact that Hegel was able to deploy

its concept means that dusk is falling on what readers of Hegel usually perceive as a normative description of a model rational state. That's why Hegel's thought stands for a radical opening towards the future: there is in Hegel no eschatology, no image of the bright (or dark) future towards which our epoch tends. It may appear no less obvious that, for this same reason, Hegel is the worst possible choice for a thinker through whose lens one should read our present – yes, he was totally open towards the future, but was he not for this very reason unable to cast any light on it?

Our wager is here the exact opposite of this “obvious” platitude: precisely as totally “out of date,” Hegel's thought provides unique lenses to perceive the prospects and threats of our time. To be a Hegelian today does not mean to construct a new ideal (of full recognition, of rational state, of scientific knowing), and then analyze how and why we are not yet there and how to get there. What it means is to act as a true post-Hegelian: to take Hegel not as a conclusion but as a starting point and ask: how would our present state of things appear from this starting point? Again, what if Hegel allows us as a better (proper) understanding of precisely those phenomena which are distinctly post-Hegelian, which stand for what “Hegel couldn't imagine”?

### [A Hegelian Approach...](#)

But which Hegel am I referring to here? Where am I speaking from?<sup>2</sup> To simplify it to the utmost, the triad that defines my philosophical stance is that of Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. Spinoza is arguably the pinnacle of realist ontology: there is substantial reality out there, and we can get to know it through our reason, dispelling the veil of illusions. Kant's transcendental turn introduces a radical gap here: we cannot ever gain access to the way things are in themselves, our reason is constricted to the domain of phenomena, and if we try to reach beyond phenomena to the totality of being, our mind gets caught in necessary antinomies and inconsistencies. What Hegel does here is to posit that there is no reality in-itself beyond phenomena, which does not mean that all that there is is the interplay of phenomena. The phenomenal world is marked by the bar



of impossibility, but beyond this bar there is nothing, no other world, no positive reality, so we are not returning to pre-Kantian realism; it is just that what for Kant is the limitation of our knowledge, the impossibility to reach the thing-in-itself, is inscribed into this thing itself.

But, again, can Hegel still play this role of the unsurpassable horizon of our thinking? Does the true rupture with traditional metaphysical universe, the rupture which defines the coordinates of our thinking, not take place later? The safest indication of this rupture is our gut feeling that overwhelms us when we read some classical metaphysical text – something tells us that today, we simply cannot any longer think like that ... And does such a gut feeling also not overwhelm us when we read Hegel's speculations about the absolute Idea, etc.? There are a couple of candidates for this rupture which makes Hegel no longer our contemporary, beginning with the post-Hegelian turn of Schelling, Kierkegaard and Marx, but this turn can be easily accounted for in the terms of an immanent reversal of the German Idealist topic. With regard to philosophical issues that predominated in the last decades, a new and more convincing case for this rupture was made by Paul Livingston who, in his *The Politics of Logic*,<sup>3</sup> located it in the new space symbolized by the names "Cantor" and "Goedel," where, of course, "Cantor" stands for set theory, through self-relating procedures (empty set, set of sets), and compels us to admit an infinity of infinities, and "Goedel" for his two incompleteness theorems which demonstrate that – to simplify it to the utmost – an axiomatic system cannot demonstrate its own consistency since it necessarily generates statements which can neither be proved nor disproved by it.

With this rupture, we enter a new universe which compels us to leave behind the notion of a consistent view of (all of) reality. (Even Marxism, at least in its predominant form, can still be viewed as a mode of thinking that belongs in the old universe: it elaborates a quite consistent view of social totality, in some versions even of the all of reality.) However, the new universe has nothing whatsoever to do with the irrationalism of *Lebensphilosophie* whose first representative was Schopenhauer, i.e., with the idea that our rational mind is just a thin surface and that the true bases of reality are

irrational drives. We remain within the domain of reason, and this domain is deprived of its consistency from within: immanent inconsistencies of reason do not imply that there is some deeper reality which escapes reason; these inconsistencies are in some sense “the thing itself.” We thus find ourselves in a universe in which inconsistencies are not a sign of our epistemological confusion, of the fact that we missed “the thing itself” (which by definition cannot be inconsistent), but, on the contrary, a sign that we have touched the real.

The roots of all these inconsistencies are, of course, the paradoxes of self-relating, of a set becoming one of its own elements, of a set including an empty set as one of its sub-sets, as its own stand-in among its sub-sets. The Hegelo-Lacanian perspective conceives these paradoxes as an indication of the presence of subjectivity: subject can emerge only in the imbalance between a genus and its species, the void of subjectivity is ultimately the empty set as the species in which a genus encounters itself in its oppositional determination, as Hegel would have put it. But how can the same feature be the sign of subjectivity and simultaneously the sign that we touched the real? Do we not touch the real precisely when we succeed in erasing our subjective standpoint and perceive things “the way they really are,” independently of our subjective standpoint? The lesson of both Hegel and Lacan is exactly the opposite: every vision of “objective reality” is already constituted through (transcendental) subjectivity, and we only touch the real when we include in the scope of our vision the cut-in-the-real of subjectivity itself.

The metaphysics of subjectivity deals with these paradoxes by means of the notion of reflexivity as the basic feature of self-consciousness, of our mind’s ability to relate to itself, to be aware not only of objects but also of itself, of how it relates to objects. The elementary gesture of reflexivity is that of taking a step back and including in the picture or situation one is observing or analyzing one’s own presence – only in this way can one get the full picture. When, in a detective novel, the investigator is analyzing the scene of the crime, he has to include in it his own presence, his own gaze – sometimes, the crime is literally staged for him, to attract his gaze, to

involve him in the story. (In some movies, the detective who investigates a murder discovers that he is directly its addressee, i.e., that the murderer intended the crime as a warning to him.) Similarly, in one of the Perry Mason novels, Mason witnesses the police interrogation of a couple suspected of murder and cannot understand why the husband more than willingly narrates all the details of what the couple was doing on the day of the murder, but then he gets it – the true addressee of the husband's detailed report was his wife, i.e., he used the opportunity of being together (the two were kept separated in the prison) to tell her their false alibi, the lie they should both stick to ... One can also imagine a story in which the suspected murderer tells the police is a veiled blackmailing threat to one of the police detectives present. What all these cases share is the fact that to understand a statement, one has to identify its addressee. That's why a detective needs a figure like Holmes's Watson or Poirot's Hastings, somebody who stands for the big Other in its aspect of the common sense, the gaze the murderer had in view when he committed the crime.

What becomes palpable with Cantor/Goedel's rupture is the full extent of self-referential paradoxes that pertain to subjectivity: once we include our own position in the picture of the all, there is no way back to a consistent worldview. The Cantor/Goedel rupture thus renders impossible a consistent totality. We have to choose between totality and consistency, we cannot have both at the same time, and this choice is actualized in the two orientations of the twentieth-century thought baptized by Livingston: generic (Badiou's stance of opting for consistency at the expense of totality) and paradoxico-critical (opting for totality at the expense of consistency – into this pot, Livingston not quite convincingly throws Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Agamben and Lacan). At this point we notice the first strange fact in Livingston's edifice, a surprising imbalance: although paradoxico-critical and generic are presented as two ways to deal with the new universe which renders consistent totality impossible, we get on the one side a multiplicity of very divergent thinkers and on the other one name alone, Badiou. The implication of this imbalance is clear: it demonstrates that the true topic of Livingston's book is how to

provide a proper paradoxico-critical answer to Badiou's generic approach? Livingston treats Badiou with great respect and is well aware that the logical and political foundations of his generic position are elaborated in a much more precise manner than the respective positions of the main representatives of the paradoxico-critical approach. What makes Badiou so important is that he explicitly elaborates his position on the topic indicated by the title of Livingston's book, "the politics of logic": the profound political implications of the philosophico-logical topic of consistency, totality, and the paradoxes of self-reference. Do such paradoxes not lie at the very heart of every power edifice which has to impose itself in an illegitimate way and then retroactively legitimize its exercise of power?

While I deeply appreciate Livingston's approach, my differences with him are multiple. First, the basic duality of the universe of thought that precedes the Cantor/Goedel rupture is for me not that between ontotheological and criteriological, but that between ontological (in the sense of realist universal ontology) and transcendental – between Spinoza and Kant, to give two exemplary names. Second, the true rupture with this universe is enacted already by Hegel, and post-Hegelian thought is a regression with regard to Hegel. Livingston's stance towards Hegel is clear: while he admits that Hegel's dialectics is an exemplary case of inconsistent totality, he claims that, nonetheless, in Hegel's thought this inconsistency is ultimately "sublated" in a larger totality of rational self-development, so that antagonisms and contradictions are reduced to subordinated moments of the One. Although this view may appear almost self-evident, one should nonetheless question it. Hegel differs from the paradoxico-critical stance not because in his thought all antagonisms and contradictions are "sublated" in the One of the dialectical totality – the difference is much more subtle.

To explain this difference, let's make a detour through Lacan. For a Lacanian, it is immediately evident that Livingston's duality of generic and paradoxico-critical perfectly fits the duality of the masculine side and the feminine side of the "formulas of sexuation." Badiou's generic position is clearly "masculine": we have the universal order of being (whose ontological structure is described in detail in

Badiou's work), and the exception of truth-events which can happen occasionally. The order of being is consistent and continuous, obeying strict ontological rules, allowing no self-referential paradoxes; it is a universe with no pre-established unity, a universe composed of multitudes of multitudes, of many worlds and many languages. Badiou provides here a great lesson against the traditional wisdom according to which life is a circular movement and ultimately everything returns to dust:<sup>4</sup> this closed circle of reality, of its generation and corruption, is not all there is; miracles happen from time to time, the circular movement of life is suspended by the irruption of something that traditional metaphysics and theology called eternity, a moment of stasis in the double sense of the term (fixation, freezing of the movement of life, and simultaneously disturbance, unrest, the rise of something that resists the regular flow of things). Think about falling in love: it is a radical disturbance of my life as usual, and my life gets frozen by the fixation on the beloved ... In contrast to this logic of universal order of Being and its eventual exception, the paradoxico-critical approach focuses on the immanent inconsistencies and disturbances of the order of Being itself. There is no exception to Being – not because the order of Being is all there is but because, to put it in speculative terms, paradoxico-critical analysis demonstrates how *this order is already in itself its own exception*, sustained by permanent violations of its own rules. Although Badiou describes in precise terms how the voids and gaps (between presence and representation) in the order of Being render an Event possible, he nonetheless defines the Event as a miraculous intrusion which disturbs the continuity of Being, as something that is not part of Being.<sup>5</sup>

From the paradoxico-critical standpoint, however, the order of Being is constitutively pulverized and disturbed from within – in Freudian terms, and insofar as Badiou constantly refers to the order of human Being as the survivalist search for pleasures, one could say that Badiou neglects the dimension of what Freud called the “death drive,” the disruptive force of non-being in the heart of Being. In this way, we pass from the “masculine” to the “feminine” logic: instead of the universal order of Being disturbed by eventual exceptions, Being itself is branded by a basic impossibility, not-all.

Livingston perspicuously notices the price Badiou has to pay for his universal and consistent mathematical ontology: he has to posit as the basic constituents of reality multitude and void, “multitudes of multitudes” that emerge out of the void and not through the self-differentiation of the One. In the Cantor-Goedel universe, one can get a consistent universality only if the One is excluded from it at the most basic level – One emerges in a second time, as the result of the operation of counting that constitutes out of the multitude a world. At this level, we also have an irreducible multiplicity of worlds – bodies, worlds, languages, they are all multiple, impossible to totalize under some One. The only true universality, the only universality able to impose a One which traverses the multiplicity of bodies and languages (and also of “worlds”) is the universality of an Event. In politics, at the level of Being there is just a multiplicity of bodies and languages, or of “worlds” (cultures), so all we can get at this level is some kind of liberal multiculturalism and tolerance for irreducible difference, every project of imposing a universal Project that would unite all culture – like Communism – has to appear as an oppressive violent imposition. In contrast to Badiou’s generic approach, the paradoxico-critical approach does not accept the ontological priority of the multiple over the One: of course every One is undermined, failed, fractured by antagonisms and inconsistencies, but it is here from the beginning as the impossibility which opens up the space for multiplicity. With regard to language, the Bible is right with its parable of the tower of Babylon: the multiplicity of languages presupposes the failure of the One Language. This is what Hegel aims at by his notion of “concrete universality”: the enchainment of failures. Multiple forms of state arise because state is in itself an inconsistent/antagonist notion.

To put it in a different way, the elementary move of concrete universality is to turn the exception to a universality into the element that grounds this universality itself. Let’s take a perhaps surprising case, that of the Jews and the State of Israel. Alain Finkielkraut wrote: “The Jews, they have today chosen the path of rooting.”<sup>6</sup> It is easy to discern in this claim an echo of Heidegger who, in his *Spiegel* interview, asserts that all essential and great things can only emerge from our having a homeland, from being rooted in a tradition.



The irony is that we are dealing here with a weird attempt to mobilize anti-Semitic clichés in order to legitimize Zionism: anti-Semitism reproaches the Jews for being rootless, and it is as if Zionism tries to correct this failure by belatedly providing Jews with roots ... No wonder many conservative anti-Semites ferociously support the expansion of the State of Israel. However, the trouble with Jews today is that they are now trying to get roots in a place which for thousands of years was not theirs but inhabited by other people. The solution is here not to re-normalize the Jews into yet another rooted nation, but to turn the perspective around: what if Jews as the exception are a true stand-in for universality, i.e., what if, at the most radical level, “we are all Jews,” what if being-rootless is the primordial state of being-human, and our roots are a secondary phenomenon, an attempt to obfuscate our constitutive rootlessness?

But Hegel here takes a step further from what Livingston describes as the paradoxico-critical stance: for Hegel, the One of self-identity is not just always inconsistent, fractured, antagonistic, etc. – identity itself is the assertion of radical (self-)difference: to say that something is identical with itself means that it is distinct from all its particular properties, that it cannot be reduced to them. “A rose is a rose” means that a rose is something more than all its features – there is some *je ne sais quoi* which makes it a rose, something “more in a rose than the rose itself.” As this last example indicates, we are also dealing here with what Lacan called *objet petit a*, the mysterious X beneath all its properties that makes an object what it is, that sustains its unique identity. More precisely, this “more” oscillates between the sublime and the ridiculous or vulgar, obscene even: to say “a law is a law” means that, even if it is unjust and arbitrary, an instrument of corruption even, a law remains a law and has to be respected. The minimal structure of identity (which is always self-identity since it is, as Hegel knew it, a category of reflection) is thus 1-1-a: a thing is itself in contrast with its determinate properties, and *objet a* is the unfathomable excess that sustains this identity.

This, finally, brings us to the subtle difference between Hegel and the paradoxico-critical approach: it is not that Hegel subordinates inconsistencies and antagonisms to some higher unity; it is, on the

contrary, that for Hegel identity, the unity of the One, is a form of self-differentiation. Identity is difference brought to the extreme of self-relating. The unity of the One is not permanently threatened by cracks and inconsistencies, the unity of the One is the crack as such. What this means is that the Hegelian totality is paradoxical, inconsistent, but not “critical” in the sense of resisting the power center; it is not caught in the eternal struggle to undermine or displace the power center, in search of cracks and “undecidable” excesses that disturb and deconstruct the power edifice. Or, to put it in the Hegelian terms of speculative identity, power is its own transgression, grounded in violations of its own founding principles. Although the paradoxico-critical approach brings out the inconsistencies that are constitutive of our identities, its critical stance commits it to the goal of overcoming these inconsistencies; this goal is, of course, out of reach, forever missed and postponed, which is why the paradoxico-critical approach perceives itself as an endless process. Derrida, the ultimate paradoxico-critical thinker, likes to talk about deconstruction as an infinite pursuit of justice, and, in politics, about “democracy to come” (never already-here).

In clear contrast to this stance, Hegel is *not* a critical thinker: his basic stance is that of reconciliation – not reconciliation as a long-term goal but reconciliation as a fact which confronts us with the unexpected bitter truth of the actualized Ideal. If there is a Hegelian motto, it is something like: find a truth in how things go wrong! The message of Hegel is not “the spirit of trust” (the title of Brandom’s latest book on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*), but rather the spirit of distrust – his premise is that every large human project goes wrong and only in this way attests to its truth. The French Revolution wanted universal freedom and climaxed in terror, Communism wanted global emancipation and gave birth to Stalinist terror ... Hegel’s lesson is thus a new version of Big Brother’s famous slogan from Orwell’s *1984* “freedom is slavery”: when we try to enforce freedom directly, the result is slavery. So whatever Hegel is, he is decidedly not a thinker of a perfect ideal that we approach infinitely. Heinrich Heine (who was Hegel’s student in the philosopher’s last years) propagated the story that he once told Hegel he could not endorse Hegel’s formula “all that is actual is rational,” and that Hegel

looked carefully around and told his student not too loudly: “Perhaps, I should say: all that is actual *should be* rational.” Even if factually true, this anecdote is philosophically a lie – if not an outright invention of Heine; it represents Hegel’s attempt to cover up from his student the painful truth of his thinking.

Renouncing a critical stance does not imply renouncing social change, it just raises the stakes of this change. Let’s take the touchy case of receiving immigrants. Pia Klemp, captain of the ship *Iuventa* which was saving refugees in the Mediterranean, concluded her explanation as to why she decided to refuse the Grand Vermeil medal awarded to her by the city of Paris with the slogan: “Documents and housing for all! Freedom of movement and residence!”<sup>7</sup> If this means that – to cut a long story short – every individual has the right to move to a country of his/her choice, and that this country has the duty to provide him/her with residence, then we are dealing here with an abstract vision in the strict Hegelian sense: a vision which ignores the complex context of social totality. The problem cannot be solved at this level: the only true solution is to change the global economic system which produces immigrants. The task is thus to take a step back from direct criticism to the analysis of the immanent antagonism of the criticized phenomenon, with the focus on how our critical position itself participates in the phenomenon it criticizes.

The Hegelian lesson with regard to the attempt to change the world is thus desperately optimistic: such attempts never reach their goal, but through their repeated failure a new form of being can arise. Yes, Chavismo failed in Venezuela, Syriza failed in Greece, Chinese Communism cannot be our ideal, but all these processes do contribute to the subterranean weaving of the Spirit which might give birth to unpredictable new visions ... or horrors.

### **... to a Wired Brain**

And this brings us to the topic of the present book. It is our premise that Hegel’s outline of an inconsistent totality is the ultimate stand of thinking, and we should also not be afraid to apply to it Hegel’s above-quoted claim that philosophy can only paint “grey on grey,”

that it can only grasp the notional truth of an epoch when this epoch is approaching its end. The fact that Hegel's thought is re-emerging today as the ultimate form of the Cantor-Goedel universe means that there is on the horizon a new historical form which poses a threat to it. It is our further premise that the prospect of a wired brain (a direct link between our brain and a digital machine, what is popularly called "neuralink") is the main indication of this threat, so the question is: what will happen with the human spirit, with our subjectivity, if something like the wired brain will effectively emerge? Perhaps, what will elude the digital space is not the complexity of thinking but the most elementary self-identity of a thing, the simple "A is A" which works only in a symbolic space ...

This book is therefore not a study of Hegel. What it tries to practice is a Hegelian approach. Its premise is that Hegel is alive as a thinker only if his approach still works, i.e., only if the question "how does our time look in the eyes of Hegel?" remains meaningful and productive. And can one imagine a more stern test of the continuing productivity of the Hegelian approach than the phenomenon of the wired brain which is a post-Hegelian phenomenon *par excellence*, something totally unthinkable for Hegel, something that clearly belongs to a different era?

To practice a Hegelian approach means a couple of things. First, this book offers a philosophical analysis of the notion of the wired brain and its ideological extrapolation, the notion of Singularity. It does not deal with the vast empirical domains of technology, economics, politics, sexuality or art, i.e., it does not provide a close analysis of specific phenomena such as the implications of the wired brain for the technology of medicine, markets, computing algorithms, and it ignores specific topics like the implications of the wired brain for transsexuality. It focuses on one and only one key question: how will the phenomenon of a wired brain affect not only our self-experience of free human individuals, but also our very status of free human individuals? This question will also compel us to clarify the notion of being-human itself: if we are effectively entering a post-human era, how does this fact allow us to perceive in a new way the essence of being-human? As a rule, we can only perceive the essential dimension of a certain phenomenon when its very

existence is threatened, in the same way we can only experience the spiritual weight of a person when he or she unexpectedly dies. My focus on this key question is easily discernible by its obsessive repetition in almost every chapter of the book, as if I am desperately trying to unravel an unresolvable enigma.

Second, the Hegelian approach means that it would be meaningless to try to define in advance the notions of the wired brain and of Singularity, since it is the very task of this book to elaborate them. All that we can do here is to demarcate them in a purely formal way. “Wired brain” refers to a direct link between our mental processes and a digital machine, a link which, while it enables me to directly trigger events in reality with a mere thought (I think about something like starting my air conditioner, the computer deciphers my thought and triggers the air conditioner), it also enables the digital machine to control my thoughts. “Singularity” refers to the idea that, by way of directly sharing my thoughts and experiences with others (a machine which reads my mental processes can also transpose it to another mind), a domain of global shared mental experience will emerge which will function as a new form of divinity – my thoughts will be directly immersed in a global Thought of the universe itself.

One should note that we will also leave aside the problem of the technological feasibility of a wired brain (can it really be done the way post-humanists plan to do it?). Among numerous reports, let us just mention AlterEgo, “a wearable silent speech output–input device developed by MIT Media Lab. The device is attached around the head, neck, and jawline and translates your brain speech center impulse input into words on a computer, without vocalization.”<sup>8</sup> Arnav Kapur (who developed the system) points out that “it’s not just reading your thoughts; you have to consciously decide to use it”:

The small headset is able to detect, via powerful sensors, the signals the brain sends to internal speech mechanisms, like the tongue or larynx, when you speak to yourself. Imagine asking yourself a question, but not actually saying the words aloud. Even if you don’t move your lips or your face, your internal speech system is still doing the work of forming that sentence. Your

internal speech muscles like your tongue are vibrating in accordance with the words you're thinking in ways that are very subtle and *almost* undetectable.<sup>9</sup>

For the time being, I thus have to will it since the machine does not read my mind but my internal speech muscles which move only when I have the intention to speak. At this level, lying is still possible: I just simply imagine wanting to say something that is not true, my speech muscles will move accordingly and the machine will “read” this deceitful speech intention of mine as a fact ... However, one can easily imagine the step further making it possible for the machine to follow my line of thought without my consent or even my awareness of it – a clear dystopian prospect.

But do we really live in a dystopian time or do we rather live in a time of dystopian fantasies? Is the idea of a wired brain itself, with its vision of collective sharing of intimate experiences, not a fantasy, a fantasmatic extrapolation of trends which cannot be realized the way they are conceived? One thing is for sure: we should not underestimate the shattering impact of collectively shared experience – even if it will be realized in a much more modest way than today's grandiose visions of Singularity, everything will change with it. The sceptics' view was best encapsulated in a recent debate in Seoul where an old gentleman (whose name escapes me) proposed a wonderful paradox: not only will Singularity not be as bad as predicted (we, humans, will retain our spirituality with all its ambiguities, beliefs without beliefs, references to absentials, etc.), but it also cannot happen. While agreeing that it cannot happen the way it is described by its proponents, we should nonetheless insist that something new and unpredictable will happen. Peter Sloterdijk<sup>10</sup> was right to characterize Ray Kurzweil as a new John the Baptist, a forerunner of a new form of post-humanity: Kurzweil perfectly captured the radical implications of a wired brain; he saw clearly that our entire vision of reality and our role in it will change.

More than the idea of a wired brain, Kurzweil's notion of Singularity relies on the prospect of artificial intelligence (AI): he predicts that, due to the exponential growth of the capacity of digital machines, we will soon be dealing with machines which will not only display all the



signs of self-awareness but also far surpass human intelligence. We should not confuse this “posthuman” stance with the paradigmatically modern belief in the possibility of total technological domination over nature – what we are witnessing today is an exemplary dialectical reversal: the slogan of today’s “posthuman” sciences is no longer domination, but surprise (contingent, nonplanned) emergence. Jean-Pierre Dupuy detected a weird reversal of the traditional Cartesian anthropocentric arrogance which grounded human technology, the reversal clearly discernible in today’s robotics, genetics, nanotechnology, artificial life and AI researches:

how are we to explain that science became such a “risky” activity that, according to some top scientists, it poses today the principal threat to the survival of humanity? Some philosophers reply to this question by saying that Descartes’s dream – “to become master and possessor of nature” – has turned wrong, and that we should urgently return to the “mastery of mastery”. They have understood nothing. They don’t see that the technology profiling itself at our horizon through “convergence” of all disciplines aims precisely at nonmastery. The engineer of tomorrow will not be a sorcerer’s apprentice because of his negligence or ignorance, but by choice. He will “give” himself complex structures or organizations and he will try to learn what they are capable of by way of exploring their functional properties – an ascending, bottom-up approach. He will be an explorer and experimenter at least as much as an executor. The measure of his success will be more the extent to which his own creations will surprise him than the conformity of his realization to the list of preestablished tasks.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

Is this weird tendency to actualize self-annihilation not a clear and unexpected form of what Freud called the death-drive? The motor of this self-surpassing of humans is the ongoing scientific progress in evolutionary biology, neurology, and cognitivist brain sciences which is sustained by a weird form of shame: the shame about our biological limitations, our mortality, the ridiculous way we reproduce ourselves – what Gunther Anders called the “Promethean shame,”<sup>[12](#)</sup> ultimately simply the shame that “we were born and not

manufactured.” Nietzsche’s idea that we are the “last men” laying the ground for our own extinction and the arrival of a new Overman is thereby given a scientific-technological twist ... However, due to our limitations we shall ignore in this book the topic of AI. Although AI and the wired brain are obviously interlinked, they are clearly distinct: AI can surpass us, humans, without drawing us into the space of shared experience, i.e., leaving our miserable brains to function the way they always have until now.

We therefore presume that, in spite of all simplifications and exaggerations in the public media, something is going on in this domain, and we will limit ourselves to questioning its philosophical implications and consequences. This is why the vision of Singularity is worth addressing: in spite of the overload of New Age obscurantism mixed with techno-naivety, we should paraphrase Groucho Marx and say: “They claim to present something really New, and they act like they present something really New, but this shouldn’t deceive you – they do point towards the emergence of something really New!” At this early stage of development, we can only speculate how the immersion in Singularity as the space of shared thoughts and experiences will be organized: how will the subject and/or the machine decide to get connected (or disconnected)? How will the scope of connection be decided? (How much of the machine’s knowledge will be accessible to me? In what way and with whom will I share experiences?) We should just bear in mind that all these are also questions of utmost political importance.<sup>13</sup>

The point is thus not to criticize the ideas on human mind and language presupposed by Musk, Kurzweil and other proponents of the wired brain as naïve and primitive – of course they combine a common-sense notion of ego with vulgar naturalism, but the point is that these ideas can become reality insofar as they will be embodied in digital machines which will scan and treat our brains. Even when Musk and others talk about how the wired brain can threaten our humanity, they conceive this threatened dimension, the essence of our being-human, in a very narrow and misleading way. So, perhaps, the true threat to our being-human resides in the very narrow and misleading notion of being-human that Musk, Kurzweil and others

automatically assume in their description of what is threatened by the wired brain. When we talk about post-humanity, we should always be attentive to how we understand humanity itself. Perhaps, the prospect of post-humanity will enable us precisely to gain a new insight into what being-human means.<sup>14</sup>

Three dimensions are therefore inextricably interlocked in our project: theoretical, experiential, and institutional. We oscillate all the time between these three dimensions: (1) inquiry into the structure of a wired brain, what its theoretical implications will be; (2) what it will mean for individuals to have their brains wired, how it will transform their (self-)experience; (3) and, last but not least, what will be the socio-political institutional implications of wired brains, what kind of new power relations wired brains will give birth to, how the vast digital network sustaining it will be organized and regulated? Military institutions are reacting to this threat in a predictable way: “Wanted: military ‘ethicist’. Skills: data crunching, machine learning, killer robots. Must have: cool head, moral compass and the will to say no to generals, scientists and even presidents. The Pentagon is looking for the right person to help it navigate the morally murky waters of artificial intelligence (AI), billed as the battlefield of the 21st century.”<sup>15</sup> A pseudo-solution in the vein of different ethical committees meant to limit the “misuses” of science, of course: what is needed is the public transparency of such projects.

A well-informed observer cannot help but note that these same three dimensions are constitutive of every ideology – let’s take religion: a religion is (1) a system of beliefs elaborated by theology that contains answers to “big” questions about the ultimate nature of reality; (2) a complex network of intimate experiences of the divine dimension; and (3) an ideological apparatus, a set of institutions and material practices (rituals, etc.). And the same goes for psychoanalysis which is a theory (not only) about the human psyche, a clinical practice, and (we should never forget) an “organized crowd,” a therapeutic institution with its rules of identification.<sup>16</sup> Back to Singularity, it comprises the same three dimensions: it offers a new account of humanity and its passage into post-humanity, even with a new theological dimension; it promises a new subjective

experience of being immersed in a space of collective mind; but – the aspect that is regularly neglected – Singularity will also imply a vast network of machines embedded in our social relations of domination. Will we simply be controlled by machines? Will a part of humanity retain a privileged contact with them? To put it in brutally simplified terms: how will the (eventual) rise of Singularity affect capitalism and forms of social power?

One should therefore submit the idea of a wired brain to a critical analysis that works at three different levels. First (but this is outside the scope of this book), we should question its technological feasibility: can we really construct machines that will directly interact with the neuronal flow that provides the immediate material base of our self-awareness? Second, even if we somehow succeed in wiring our brain, will this really enable a direct sharing of other people's experiences? What about the externalist view according to which our meaningful experiences are not like inner images located somewhere in our brain but "out of brain," something that occurs as the result of the complex interaction between our brain, our bodily activities, and the complex reality in which we interact, so that focusing on our isolated brain by definition misses the targeted experience? Third, even if sharing experiences will somehow work, will our subjectivity survive this immersion in a common space? To give a hint at our final result, what eludes Singularity is not my lived experience but our unconscious correlated with the autonomy of the Cartesian subject.

### Parataxis

One last caveat: a Hegelian approach that focuses on basic notions does not involve a systematic conceptual analysis which ignores particular content. If one reads Hegel closely, one quickly realizes that Hegel really proceeds in a paratactic way, moving in often violent jumps from one to another particular content – and this book is also a paratactic presentation of its topic. Parataxis (Greek παράταξις, the "act of placing side by side") is a literary technique which favors short, simple sentences, with the use of coordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions. In poetic

parataxis, two images or fragments – usually starkly dissimilar images or fragments – are juxtaposed without a clear connection, so that readers are left to make their own connections implied by the paratactic syntax ... So in some sense, the reproach that this book is neither about Hegel nor about the wired brain hits the mark – it hits the mark, but it misses the point which is precisely to circulate in a paratactic mode around its two nodal points. Is such a procedure not utterly foreign to Hegel's systematic approach? No – can one imagine a more paratactic work than Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*?

The secret model of the present book is my favorite work of E.L. Doctorow, *Lives of the Poets: A Novella and Six Stories*: six completely disparate short stories (with some subterranean echoes between them) are followed by a novella about a New York writer from which it becomes clear that the stories are fragments of the writer's imagined autobiography. This book could also have been subtitled: "A Treatise and Seven Essays": seven essays on disparate topics (neuralink, theology of the Fall, deadlocks of the construction of Socialism in the early USSR, a new police state of digital control ...) are followed by a more substantial treatise which refers to all that precedes in order to account for the philosophical implications of the prospect of a wired brain.

We begin with the political implications of the digitalization of our lives: are we approaching a new police state? From digitalization and digital control in general, we move to the more specific project of the wired brain, and we supplement its simple, naïve even, description with some open questions. The problem of how the wired brain will affect our power relations leads us back to the Soviet bio-cosmism whose vision of Communism as the space of shared experiences prefigures the gnostic notion of Singularity – Andrei Platonov clearly saw the limitations of such a gnostic notion of Communism. Then we pass to the critical analysis of the popular theosophical (New Age) reading of Singularity as the final reunification of Spirit and matter. Insofar as Singularity promises to undo what Christianity calls the Fall, a link between the Fall, freedom, and the limitation of our knowledge is explored with the aim of making clear the contrast between Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung* and the sublation of our

finitude in Singularity. Next, the self-reflexive structure of the Unconscious is elaborated with the goal of outlining the contours of a dimension of our symbolic universe which will elude Singularity. A literary fantasy that follows tries to imagine the mode of subjectivity that will emerge through the expansion of wired brains: what if the Cartesian ruminations of Beckett's "unnamable" show us the way? The premise of the concluding treatise is that the eventual occurrence of Singularity will obviously be apocalyptic, but what kind of apocalypse will it be, with or without a new kingdom that will ensue from it? The passage into post-humanity clearly marks the end of history as we knew it – but what ends and what begins with it? The reader should not look for detailed predictions here: this book is a philosophical reflection which can only surmise as to how our subjectivity will be affected by the eventual rise of the wired brain. Plus, since our brains will be wired without us even being aware of it, a new form of freedom and power will arise which will reside simply in our being able to isolate (or, rather, disconnect) oneself from Singularity. The prospect of total digital control of which we are not even aware confronts us brutally with the basic philosophical question: is our only chance of freedom in isolation from the space of Singularity, or is there a dimension of being-human which in principle eludes Singularity even if we are fully immersed in it?

So in some sense, this book is also a series of essays on the paradox of indirectness which haunts philosophy from its beginnings: why a detour in our approach to a thing offers more than a direct attempt to seize it. This paradox works at a multitude of levels. Why can we approach truth only through lies and deceptive illusions, i.e., why do we miss the truth itself if we ignore the cobweb of lies that surrounds it? Winston Churchill was right when he wrote truth is so precious that it has to be protected by a thick defensive wall of lies. Why can an artistic fiction render the essence of an epoch much more faithfully than its documentary description? Why do we learn more about Elizabethan England from Shakespeare's plays than from detailed works on history? And, last but not least, why does a direct approach to an erotic object provides less pleasure than the complex strategy of postponing the encounter and circulating around the object? Two thinkers elaborated in detail this paradox of



indirectness: Hegel and Lacan. The basic premise of the Hegelian dialectics is that the path to truth is a moment of truth itself: truth is ultimately nothing other than the systematic articulation of a succession of errors. Lacan introduced the concept of surplus-enjoyment precisely in order to explain why the postponement of pleasure, its prohibition even, generates an enjoyment of its own. Today, with the explosive development of digital technologies, this problem of indirectness is aggravated to the extreme. Digitalization makes our most intimate experiences indirect: pornography is becoming a part of our daily erotic life, and we are more and more approaching reality itself through digital media which not only render it faithfully but even enhance it. However, new trends in cognitive sciences and technologies open up the prospect of direct participation in others' thought and experiences, by-passing the medium of language and other forms of communication – how will this affect our being-human?

So, again, this is not a book about Hegel, this is a book about how a latter-day Hegel would have confronted something that is totally alien to his universe, the phenomenon of a wired brain, a contemporary version of Hegel's own infinite judgment "the spirit is a bone" – our mind is a digital machine. Hegel says that the true beginning of logic is the "resolve" to think – to think anything at all, to do something, even if not in the sense of a positive action. A Heideggerian would immediately read this claim as a proof that Hegel remains within the horizon of the metaphysics of Willing; while this reading can be rejected, the fact remains the founding role if the resolve signals the dimension of subjectivity – but in a very complex way, not just that "somebody has to think thoughts." The status of "resolve" in Hegel is not psychological or irrational (an irrational excess external to logic), but strictly logical, immanent to the logical edifice. This same resolve has to intervene directly at every important turn when something radically New emerges: at such turning points, we have to resolve anew to think if we want to effectively grasp the new phenomenon – and the prospect of neuralink is definitely such an occasion.

# 1

## The Digital Police State

### Fichte's Revenge on Hegel

Where do we stand today with regard to our social freedom? The prospect of the thorough digitalization of our daily lives combined with scanning our brain (or tracking our bodily processes with implants) opens up the realistic possibility of an external machine that will know ourselves, biologically and psychically, much better than we know ourselves: registering what we eat, buy, read and watch, and discerning our moods, fears and satisfactions, the external machine will get a much more accurate picture of ourselves than our conscious Self which, as we know, doesn't even exist as a consistent entity. Yuval Harari, who deployed this vision,<sup>1</sup> points out that our "Self" is composed of narratives which retroactively try to impose some consistency on the pandemonium of our experiences, obliterating experiences and memories which disturb these narratives. Ideology does not reside primarily in stories invented (by those in power) to deceive others, it resides in stories invented by subjects to deceive themselves. But the pandemonium persists, and the machine will register the discords and will maybe even be able to deal with them in a much more rational way than our conscious Self. Say, when I have to decide to marry or not, the machine will register all the shifting attitudes that haunt me, the past pains and disappointments that I prefer to sweep under the carpet. And why not extend this prospect even to political decisions? While my Self can be easily seduced by a populist demagogue, the machine will take note of all my past frustrations, it will register the inconsistency between my fleeting passions and my other opinions – so why should the machine not vote on my behalf? So while brain sciences confirm the "post-structuralist" or "deconstructionist" idea that we are

stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, and that these stories are a confused bricolage, an inconsistent multiplicity of stories with no single Self totalizing them, it seems to offer (or promise, at least) a way out which is due to its very disadvantage: precisely because the machine which reads us all the time is “blind,” without awareness, a mechanical algorithm, it can make decisions which are much more adequate than those made by human individuals, much more adequate not only with regard to external reality but also and above all with regard to these individuals themselves, to what they really want or need:

Liberalism sanctifies the narrating self, and allows it to vote in the polling stations, in the supermarket, and in the marriage market. For centuries this made good sense, because though the narrating self believed in all kinds of fictions and fantasies, no alternative system knew me better. Yet once we have a system that really does know me better, it will be foolhardy to leave authority in the hands of the narrating self. Liberal habits such as democratic elections will become obsolete, because Google will be able to represent even my own political opinions better than myself.”<sup>2</sup>

One can make a very realist case for this option: it is not that the computer which registers our activity is omnipotent and infallible, it is simply that, on average, its decisions work substantially better than the decisions of our mind: in medicine, it makes better diagnoses than our average doctor, etc., up to the exploding algorithmic trading on stock markets where programs that one can download for free already outperform financial advisers. One thing is clear: the liberal “true Self,” the free agent which enacts what I “really want,” simply doesn’t exist, and fully endorsing this inexistence means abandoning the basic individualist premise of liberal democracy. The digital machine as the latest embodiment of the big Other, the “subject supposed to know,” which operates as a subjectless field of knowledge ...

There is, of course, a whole series of questions that persist here. Harari is aware of them: “In the past, censorship worked by blocking the flow of information. In the twenty-first century, censorship works by flooding people with irrelevant information ... In ancient times

having power meant having access to data. Today having power means knowing what to ignore.”<sup>3</sup> Can this ignoring be done by a “blind” machine or does it require a minimal form of subjectivity?

There is a long tradition, in philosophy and in the sciences, of denying free will, but doubts about free will “don’t really change history unless they have a practical impact on economics, politics, and day-to-day life. Humans are masters of cognitive dissonance, and we allow ourselves to believe one thing in the laboratory and an altogether different thing in the courthouse or in parliament.”<sup>4</sup> Harari points out how even popular champions of the new scientific world like Dawkins or Pinker, after writing hundreds of pages which debunk free will and freedom of choice, end up supporting political liberalism.<sup>5</sup> However, today, “liberalism is threatened not by the philosophical idea that ‘there are no free individuals,’ but rather by concrete technologies. We are about to face a flood of extremely useful devices, tools and structures that make *no* allowance for the free will of individual humans. Can democracy, the free market and human rights survive this flood?”<sup>6</sup> So if development will render *homo sapiens* obsolete, what will follow it? A post-human *homo deus* (with abilities that are traditionally identified as divine), or a quasi-omnipotent digital machine? Singularity (global consciousness) or blind intelligence without awareness?

Immersion in singularity is just the first option. The second option: if machines win, then “humans are in danger of losing their value, because intelligence is decoupling from consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> This decoupling of intelligence and consciousness confronts us again with the enigma of consciousness: in spite of numerous rather desperate attempts, evolutionary biology has no clear answer to what is the evolutionary function of awareness/consciousness. Consequently, now that intelligence is decoupling from consciousness, “what will happen to society, politics and daily life when nonconscious but highly intelligent algorithms know us better than we know ourselves?”<sup>8</sup>

The third and most realist option: a radical division, much stronger than the class division, within human society itself. In the near future, biotechnology and computer algorithms will join their powers in

producing “bodies, brains and minds,” with the gap exploding “between those who know how to engineer bodies and brains and those who do not”: “those who ride the train of progress will acquire divine abilities of creation and destruction, while those left behind will face extinction.”<sup>9</sup> The main threat is therefore that of the rise of a

small and privileged elite of upgraded humans. These superhumans will enjoy unheard-of abilities and unprecedented creativity, which will allow them to go on making many of the most important decisions in the world ... However, most humans will not be upgraded, and they will consequently become an inferior caste, dominated by both computer algorithms and the new superhumans ... Splitting humankind into biological castes will destroy the foundations of liberal ideology.<sup>10</sup>

However, this splitting into casts will also not be as straightforward as it may appear. How will the new elite be defined? Will the elite be a special upgraded biological cast with superhuman abilities (which means that its members will also be controlled and genetically manipulated), or will they be exempted from control while controlling and manipulating others? Probably both at the same time. In the suburbs of Shanghai there are already clinics where rich Western couples go to genetically check and manipulate their offspring before children are born – to what extent will the new elite then be able to control the digital and biochemical/genetic machines that control them? We don’t have the space here to deal with the vast domain of biogenetic interventions destined to create new post-human entities – here is the title and subtitle of an *El País* report: “Spanish scientists create human-monkey chimera in China. The team led by Juan Carlos Izpisúa injected stem cells into the animal embryos as part of research aimed at finding a way to grow organs for transplants.”<sup>11</sup> Note the usual humanitarian justification – we are really doing it to grow organs for transplants, and not for the much more obvious reason to enhance (or diminish) human capacities in order to create post-human perfect workers or soldiers. This idea has a long history in the twentieth century: back in the late 1920s, none other than Stalin for some time financially supported the

“human-ape” project proposed by the biologist Ilya Ivanov. The idea was that by way of coupling humans and orangutans, it would be possible to create a perfect worker and soldier impervious to pain, tiredness and bad food. (In his spontaneous racism and sexism, Ivanov, of course, tried to couple male humans and female apes, plus the humans he used were black males from Congo since they were supposed to be genetically closer to apes – the Soviet state financed an expensive expedition to Congo.) Of course, when the experiments failed, Ivanov was liquidated.

In popular terms, the prospect that opens up here is that of a new police state – what kind of police state? We should return here to Hegel and his polemics with Fichte. Fichte is often ridiculed not only for his subjective-idealist postulate of the absolute I’s self-positing (a philosophical version of Baron Münchhausen’s claim that he saved himself from the swamp in which he was drowning by pulling himself up by his own hair); he is also regularly denounced as the precursor of the modern police state which totally controls its citizens. His own words seem to confirm this scathing judgment:

In a state with the kind of constitution we have established here, every citizen has his own determinate status, and the police know fairly well where each one is at every hour of the day, and what he is doing ... In such a state crime is highly unusual and is preceded by a certain unusual activity. In a state where everything is ordered and runs according to plan, the police will observe any unusual activity and take notice immediately.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

Zdravko Kobe, in his concise description of Fichte’s well-ordered state, is thus right to claim that, in it,

the police turns out to be omnipresent. It is not merely that, as he famously proposed, every person should carry an identity card with his or her picture inside, so that the police could identify anyone on the spot, or that bills of exchange should be printed on special paper accessible exclusively to state authorities, which would make counterfeiting virtually impossible. In order to protect citizens from crime in an effective way, the police should, Fichte claims, also put major emphasis on the prevention of



transgressions and direct its activities not only against actual injuries but also against their very possibility ... The final objective of police regulations is thus to establish a transparent order that would render unlawful actions materially impossible.<sup>13</sup>

Already in his first book published in 1801, Hegel rejected Fichte's "preventive intellect and its coercive authority, the police," and denounced Fichte as a control freak: "In Fichte's state every citizen will keep at least another half dozen busy with supervision, and so on ad infinitum."<sup>14</sup> In the unpublished fragments on the German constitution from 1802/03, he reiterated this critique:

It is ... a basic prejudice of those recent theories which have been partially translated into practice that a state is a machine with a single spring which imparts movement to all the rest of its infinite mechanism, and that all the institutions which the essential nature of a society brings with it should emanate from the supreme political authority and be regulated, commanded, supervised, and directed by it.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Fichte's "pedantic craving to determine every detail," Hegel claimed that "the state should rather establish a clear distinction between what is essential to its existence and unity and what can be left to chance and arbitrary will":<sup>16</sup> the state should "demand of the individual only what is necessary for itself," and "grant the citizens their living freedom and individual will and even leave considerable scope for the latter":<sup>17</sup>

The center, as the political authority and government, must leave to the freedom of the citizens whatever is not essential to its own role of organising and maintaining authority ... nothing should be so sacred to it as the approval and protection of the citizens' free activity in such matters, regardless of utility; for this freedom is inherently sacred.<sup>18</sup>

Advocates of Hegel like to quote such passages to quell the suspicion that he was a proto-totalitarian admirer of the State. However, the prospect of digitalization of our lives throws a new light

on this opposition between Fichte and Hegel: it is as if the moment of Fichte's revenge against Hegel has arrived. When Hegel mockingly remarks that, in Fichte's state, "every citizen will keep at least another half dozen busy with supervision, and so on ad infinitum," we cannot help but notice that this refutation of Fichte's vision on empirical grounds no longer holds: with a complex digital network permanently registering our activities, the control envisaged by Fichte is today not only possible but largely already a fact. The digital registering of all our acts (plus of our health, our reading habits, our opinions and dispositions ...) ultimately aims precisely at predicting our violations of the law and then acting preventively to make it impossible for us to do it.

What makes things even worse is the fact that there is an important difference between Fichte's project of police control and today's emerging reality of digital control: Fichte's vision remains "totalitarian" in the standard sense of an external agency openly controlling us, while today's digital control is not experienced as an external limitation of our freedom. What we get here is a unique new form of the "unity of the opposites" where subjective exercise of freedom coincides with objective control. It is easy to see the structural homology between this paradox and the general vision of neuralink where a short-circuit Hegel wasn't able to imagine (a direct material unity of thought and digital material reality) is realized.

The most dangerous threat to freedom does not come from an openly authoritarian power; it takes place when our non-freedom itself is experienced as freedom. Since permissiveness and free choice are elevated into a supreme value, social control and domination can no longer appear as infringing on the subject's freedom: it has to appear as (and be sustained by) the very self-experience of individuals as free. There is a multitude of forms of this appearing of un-freedom in the guise of its opposite: when we are deprived of universal healthcare, we are told that we are given a new freedom of choice (to choose our healthcare provider); when we can no longer rely on long-term employment and are compelled to search for new precarious work every couple of years, we are told that we are given the opportunity to reinvent ourselves and discover new unexpected creative potential that has lurked in our personality;

when we have to pay for the education of our children, we are told that we become “entrepreneurs of the self,” acting like a capitalist who has to choose freely how he will invest the resources he possesses (or borrowed) – in education, health, travel ... Constantly bombarded by imposed “free choices,” forced to make decisions for which we are mostly not even properly qualified (or possess enough information about), we more and more experience our freedom as a burden that causes unbearable anxiety.

Furthermore, most of our activities (and passivities) are now registered in some digital cloud which also permanently evaluates us, tracing not only our acts but also our emotional states; when we experience ourselves as free to the utmost (surfing the web where everything is available), we are totally “externalized” and subtly manipulated. The digital network gives new meaning to the old slogan “personal is political.” And it’s not only the control of our intimate lives that is at stake: everything is today regulated by some digital network, from transport to health, from electricity to water. That’s why the web is our most important commons today, and the struggle for its control is *the* struggle today. The enemy is the combination of privatized and state-controlled commons, corporations (Google, Facebook) and state security agencies (NSA). This fact alone renders insufficient the traditional liberal notion of representative power: citizens transfer part of their power to the state, but on precise terms (this power is constrained by law, limited to very precise conditions in the way it is exercised, since the people remain the ultimate source of sovereignty and can repeal power if they decide to do so). In short, the state with its power is the minor partner in a contract which the major partner (the people) can at any point repeal or change, basically in the same way each of us can change the supermarket where we buy our provisions ... This, however, is not what is going on today. One should strongly qualify the claim, often made today, that

the state no longer disposes with devices needed to regulate civil society and does not induce the attachment that once derived from the formation process of civil society. In short, the state withers away. What remains is civil society pure, and its police. We are left with a police without a state, with a police that has assumed the

role of the state. The interface of the universal without the universal, the police as a state – this is the disturbing problem that should agitate our society.<sup>[19](#)</sup>

When the state starts to wither away, we don't get a police which is directly rooted in civil society, i.e., some kind of people's militia which gives form to (or expresses) community, overcoming the gap that separates society from state. Since society is in itself antagonistic, i.e., since the antagonism between state and society is a secondary effect of the antagonism that cuts across society itself, all such "militias" are a direct expression of one side of society against the other(s). The reality of the police without state is the pure police state – why? Here we should raise the question: is the state really withering away in today's global capitalism? Is it not becoming stronger than ever, not only regulating civil society but directly intervening in it and collaborating with (parts of) it? The emblem of today's "policing" aimed at preventing crime is the direct collaboration between state apparatuses and corporations which deal with control and information – Julian Assange was right to designate Google as a private-corporate version of a National Security Agency.

Police is closer to civil society than state; it is a kind of representative of state in civil society, but for this very reason it has to be experienced as an external force, not an inner ethical power. Civil society is the domain of the pursuit of particular private interests, of private freedom, and this freedom can (without being destroyed) only be limited from the outside. This is why it is ridiculous to equate civil society crimes with breaches of ethics with regard to the state. In civil society, what matters is that you don't break the law (and are not discovered doing it), and all the legal tricks (bending the letter of the law against its spirit) are allowed here. The force of law *must* remain an external force. This is why it is totally wrong and potentially "totalitarian" to talk about police embedded in civil society, a police whose authority does not emanate from the state since it functions as a self-organization of the people themselves – this is "people's militia," and no wonder that Communist regimes tended to call their police "militia." Who

organizes militias today? Neo-fascist right-wingers like Orban in Hungary who appealed to ordinary people to organize militia groups to search for illegal immigrants. Police is state power as it appears within the sphere of civil society in which individuals pursue their private interests; it is in its nature an external “mechanic” force, a counterpart to the abstract liveliness of individual interests. Militia is, on the contrary, precisely because of its “organic” character, a direct negation of the individual freedom that is essential to civil society. This brings us back to our starting point: today, “militia” acquires a new form in the network of digital control baptized by Shoshana Zuboff “surveillance capitalism”:

It works by providing free services that billions of people cheerfully use, enabling the providers of those services to monitor the behaviour of those users in astonishing detail – often without their explicit consent ... “Surveillance capitalism”, she writes, “unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioural data”. Although some of these data are applied to service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary behavioural surplus, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as “machine intelligence”, and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace that I call behavioural futures markets ... Knowledge, authority and power rest with surveillance capital, for which we are merely “human natural resources”. We are the native peoples now whose claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience.<sup>20</sup>

We, the watched, are not just material, we are also exploited, involved in an unequal exchange, which is why the term “behavioural surplus” (playing the role of surplus-value) is fully justified here: when we are surfing, buying, watching TV, etc., we get what we want, but we give more – we lay ourselves bare, we make the details of our life and its habits transparent to the digital big Other. The paradox is, of course, that we experience this unequal exchange, the activity which effectively enslaves us, as our highest exercise of freedom – what is more free than freely surfing on the web? Just by

exerting this freedom of ours, we generate the “surplus” appropriated by the digital big Other which collects data.

## 2

### The Idea of a Wired Brain and its Limitations

Although the rise of “surveillance capitalism” has far-reaching consequences, it is not yet the true game changer: there is much greater potential for new forms of domination in the prospect of direct brain-machine interface. One can safely surmise that all kinds of secret agencies are working intensely on it – what we learn is just the public face of it, the often sensational news about it in our media. The best-known project in this direction is Neuralink, an American neurotechnology company founded by Elon Musk and eight others, and dedicated to developing implantable brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), also called a neural-control interface (NCIs), mind-machine interface (MMIs), or direct neural interface (DNIs) – all these terms indicate the same idea of a direct communication pathway, first between an enhanced or wired brain and an external device, and then between brains themselves.<sup>1</sup>

There are thus two steps in this direct communication: first, when our brain is connected to digital machines, we can cause things to happen in reality just by thinking about them (I direct my thought at the TV screen, and the selected program starts to play; I direct my thoughts at the coffee machine, and the coffee gets made; etc.); then, my brain directly connected to another brain, so that my thoughts are directly shared by another individual (I daydream about an intense sexual experience and another individual can directly share my experience). The gradual development of communication in the direction of adding additional layers of mediation – spoken word, writing, telegraph, phone, internet ... – is here cut short, and the prospect of direct link by-passing these additional layers emerges, so that we pass from



YOUR  
BRAIN > YOUR  
VOCAL  
CORDS > AIR > MY  
EAR > MY  
BRAIN

YOUR  
BRAIN > YOUR  
VOCAL  
CORDS > AIR > YOUR  
PHONE > TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
NETWORK > MY  
PHONE > AIR > MY  
EAR > MY  
BRAIN

YOUR  
BRAIN > YOUR  
THUMBS > YOUR  
PHONE > TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
NETWORK > MY  
PHONE > AIR > MY  
EYES > MY  
BRAIN

etc., to

YOUR  
BRAIN > MY  
BRAIN

The consequence of this direct brain-to-brain communication is not just greater speed, but also accuracy: when I think about something, I don't have to translate my thought into linguistic signs which brutally simplify meaning, my partner directly perceives what I think – or, to quote Musk himself:

There are a bunch of concepts in your head that then your brain has to try to compress into this incredibly low data rate called speech or typing. That's what language is – your brain has executed a compression algorithm on thought, on concept transfer. And then it's got to listen as well, and decompress what's coming at it. And this is very lossy as well. So, then when you're doing the decompression on those, trying to understand, you're simultaneously trying to model the other person's mind state to understand where they're coming from, to recombine in your head what concepts they have in their head that they're trying to communicate to you ... If you have two brain interfaces, you could actually do an uncompressed direct conceptual communication with another person ... If I were to communicate a concept to you, you would essentially engage in consensual telepathy. You wouldn't need to verbalize unless you want to add a little flair to the conversation or something (laughs), but the conversation would be conceptual interaction on a level that's difficult to conceive of right now ... That's the thing – it's difficult to really

understand what it would be like to *think* with someone. We've never been able to try. We communicate with ourselves through thought and with everyone else through symbolic representations of thought, and that's all we can imagine.

What's difficult to conceive is the idea of directly sharing intimate experiences: "Say you're on a beautiful hike and you want to show your husband the view. No problem – just think out to him to request a brain connection. When he accepts, connect your retina feed to his visual cortex. Now his vision is filled with exactly what your eyes see, as if he's there. He asks for the other senses to get the full picture, so you connect those too and now he hears the waterfall in the distance and feels the breeze and smells the trees and jumps when a bug lands on your arm." And what is more logical than to extend this idea onto the domain of sexuality: "You could save a great sex experience in the cloud to enjoy again later – or, if you're not too private a person, you could send it over to a friend to experience. (Needless to say, the porn industry will thrive in the digital brain world.)"

The first and rather obvious philosophical reproach to this vision arises from the so-called "externalist" theory of consciousness: my self-awareness is not "in my brain," it is rooted in my individual bodily existence, it is meaningful only within this horizon, as a moment of my concrete embodied existence which comprises the thick web of my interactions with others. So what survives of my mental state (experience) if it is torn from this concrete context? What if experiences can only be shared in some quasi-religious abstract collective trance which obliterates all divergence? The latest version of the "radical externalist" position was deployed by Riccardo Manzotti – here is Tim Parks's description of Manzotti's claim that my experience is "out of my head":

For the rainbow experience to happen we need sunshine, raindrops, and a spectator. It is not that the sun and the raindrops cease to exist if there is no one there to see them. Manzotti is not a Bishop Berkeley. But unless someone is present at a particular point no colored arch can appear. The rainbow is hence a process requiring various elements, one of which happens to be an

instrument of sense perception. It doesn't exist whole and separate in the world nor does it exist as an acquired image in the head separated from what is perceived (the view held by the "internalists" who account for the majority of neuroscientists); rather, consciousness is spread between sunlight, raindrops, and visual cortex, creating a unique, transitory new whole, the rainbow experience. Or again: the viewer doesn't see the world; he is part of a world process.<sup>2</sup>

(From a Marxist viewpoint, one should add here that what forms human perceptions is not just the whole of experience but also the way perceptions are embedded into the totality of human activity, as a moment of the interaction between humans themselves and between humans and non-human objects and processes: what we perceive and how we perceive what we perceive is always overdetermined by our practical interests.) I see a double problem with this stance. First: yes, my perception of a rainbow is spread between sunlight, raindrops, and visual cortex, creating a unique, transitory new whole, the rainbow experience, so that, when another living being takes a look at the same piece of reality as me, it doesn't see a rainbow – but in some sense we are looking at the same piece of reality, or, rather, my transitory whole (of perceiving rainbow) and another's transitory whole of seeing something different partially overlap. How are we to think this Real in which both transitory wholes co-exist? To make this point clearer, let's replace rainbow with a table: the point is not that we should strive to isolate the same isolated "real" table that remains the same when each of us perceives it in a different way, but simply that of thinking the shared space in which different "transitory wholes" co-exist. I think the topological model of the twisted space of a Klein bottle helps here:<sup>3</sup> the Real is not a transcendent thing-in-itself at which we arrive when we abstract from all our perceptual distortions but the fluid "unorientable" space in which, through reflexive turns-into-oneself, multiple realities can emerge. To put it in Leibnizean terms, we are dealing here with a kind of extended monads which partially overlap with regard to their content, and the problem is how to think the

space of their co-existence since there is no divine absolute that would encompass them all.

Second: it is a little bit too easy to say that “the viewer doesn’t see the world; he is part of a world process”: in some radical sense, I (as a viewing subject) am never directly part of the world in which my perception takes place since every reality that I perceive already relies on my specific subjective standpoint – by definition I cannot directly locate myself in reality since this would mean that I somehow stepped out of myself and looked at myself “objectively,” from nowhere. This means that I as a subject am not directly part of the world: I of course have no substantial reality out of the world, but I am the void (what Hegel calls the pure self-relating negativity) that enables the constitution of a specific reality (Manzotti’s “transitory whole”) in the midst of the chaotic unorientable Real.

Back to Singularity: it may appear that, if we endorse the radical externalist view, then the prospect of shared experiences through a wired brain should be denounced as a dead end. That is to say, since the reality that we perceive is not an image in our head but outside our head, located in the whole of my brain, the perceived objects or processes and their interaction, even if a machine can fully reproduce my brain processes, it cannot reproduce our experience of what I see since it reduces it to what goes on in my brain and by definition misses the complex whole in which my experience is located ... However, the case is far from conclusive: the complex interaction of my brain with its environment gives rise to complex meaningful experiences, but this interaction has to be somehow registered in my brain, so that by reproducing the neuronal processes in my brain it could be possible to generate in another subject to share the same experience. Does something like this not happen when I feel a missing limb? Of course such an experience can only arise out of the concrete interaction between me, my body and its environs, but it remains registered in my brain and can be “pathologically” resuscitated even when the limb is missing.

We should not be too surprised by the prospect of mind-controlled machines: is my body not already a kind of mind-controlled machine, an organism directly regulated by my mind? The catch is, of course, that my body is mine – I am directly emdedded in it, while a machine

is external to me. However, the prospect of a wired brain introduces a crack into this immediacy: if it is possible for an external machine to directly register my thoughts, does this not imply that I am also not directly my body, i.e., that my body is also external to me, that I am in some sense outside myself?

However, even if we endorse the feasibility of shared experiences, various questions arise here. The first concerns the role of language in the formation of our thoughts and of our “inner life” in general. Musk simply assumes that our thoughts are present in our mind independently of their expression in language, so that if I connect my brain directly with another’s brain, the other individual will experience my thoughts directly in all their wealth and finesse, not distorted by the clumsiness and simplification of language. However, what if language in all its clumsiness and simplifications generates the elusive wealth of our thoughts? Yes, language reduces the mess of our thoughts to simple words and sentences – say, when I say to somebody “I love you!,” the wealth of my feelings is reduced to a simple formula pronounced thousands of times every day. However, this very condensation of the chaotic wealth creates complex meaning, it evokes the rich texture of what is left unsaid. We are here automatically victims of a fetishist illusion: the surplus of “deeper meaning” left unsaid is not already there and just discovered or alluded to, it is generated by the reduction of our thoughts to simple linguistic formulas. Suffice it to recall a simple substitution of “a boat” for “a sail”: the boat is reduced to one of its parts, but this reduction in itself gives birth to a web of meanings which reach far beyond a simple “boat.”

One could play here with the Hegelian variations: a thought’s true content actualizes itself only through its linguistic expression – prior to this expression, it is nothing substantial, just a confused inner intention. When speaking, I only learn what I wanted to say by effectively saying it. We think in words: even when we see and experience things and processes as particular entities, their perception is already structured through our symbolic network. Say, when I see a gun in front of me, all the meanings associated with it are symbolically overdetermined – in short, I perceive a gun but this perception is given its specific spin by the word “gun” that resonates

in it, and words always refer to universal notions. Therein resides the paradox of the symbolic overdetermination: when I perceive a gun in front of me, it is the abstract-universal word “gun” associated with it which confers on my perception the rich and complex texture of meaning that colors this perception.

However, this key role of words in our experience of meaning does not automatically devalue the project of neuralink: all one has to do to save this project is to abandon Musk’s premise that thoughts are present in our mind independently of their expression in language. Insofar as neuralink will register our inner flow of experience, why could it not register also the verbal material present in our mind, words in which we think – words reduced to mental representations, but still words?<sup>4</sup> The core of the problem resides elsewhere: in the fact that the very reduction of the material support of the expression of an idea can strengthen the expressed content (meaning). To illustrate this key point, Hegel evokes a wonderful example from the sphere of education. He notices that small children prefer to draw images using colors, while later they prefer to do them in grey, with a colorless pencil. Humanist theorists of education see in this the oppressive result of educational violence: children’s creativity is thwarted, they are forced to express themselves wearing the straitjacket of colorlessness ... Hegel’s reading, however, is exactly the opposite: it is this reduction to colorless space that, by way of reducing the sensuous wealth, enables the children to articulate the higher spiritual dimension.

The tragic fate of Eisenstein’s *Bezhin Meadow*, his first sound film, is the stuff of legend.<sup>5</sup> Commissioned by a Communist youth group, the film’s production ran from 1935 to 1937, until it was halted by the central Soviet government, which said it contained artistic, social and political failures. In the 1960s, it was learned that Eisenstein’s wife, Pera Atasheva, had saved splices of film from the editing table. Starting in 1964, a reconstruction of the film was created (and set to a musical score by Sergei Prokofiev) by Sergei Yutkevich with Naum Kleiman. The film was edited to the original script, to preserve the original cutting continuity; new intertitles were also created from the script, and a new spoken introduction was added. The film now exists as a 35-minute “silent film slide show,” something like Chris

Marker's *La Jetée* from 1962, a 28-minute-long featurette shot in black and white which is constructed almost entirely from still photos (and which tells the story of a post-nuclear-war experiment in time travel). Like Cindy Sherman's series of untitled movie stills (from non-existing movies, sometimes even with subtitles of dialogues added), Marker's reduction of the cinematic flow to a succession of motionless stills is intentional – part of his artistic project. The situation with *Bezhin Meadow* is more ambiguous: the reduction to a silent-film slide show is, of course, not part of the original project; it resulted from the desperate attempt to save whatever could be saved and somehow render presentable the remaining raw material. However, the result is so impressive that one cannot but entertain a doubt: what if the reduction to stills makes it a better film than Eisenstein's lost original, a full talking movie? What if it not only produces a poetic effect of its own, but also makes us imagine the “real” continuous action in a much richer way than its direct rendering in a continuous movie shot?

What we find in human sexuality is the obverse of simplification which gives birth to a surplus: an unnecessary complication which prevents the direct access to a goal. Human sexuality comes in a variety of perverted forms and procedures which not only cannot be reduced to different ways to reach the same goal of procreation but often run directly against this goal. However, one should always bear in mind that this excessive diversity is set in motion by an underlying impossibility or antagonism. This is why, from the psychoanalytic standpoint, one thing is sure: what the shift to the post-human amounts to at its most fundamental is the overcoming (leaving behind) of the sexual in its most radical ontological dimension – not just “sexuality” as a specific sphere of human existence but the sexual as an antagonism, the bar of an impossibility, constitutive of being-human in its finitude. Therein resides the lesson of transgender: we have the masculine, the feminine, and their antagonism (difference) as such. Transgender individuals are different (from the established difference) and, as such, they are the difference itself – the difference from the established difference is the difference itself. That's why the third category, those who do not fit the hegemonic binary of masculine and feminine, are “universal” and



“different”: they stand for universality precisely insofar as they are radically different, i.e., insofar as they do not have a proper place in the established order. (In exactly the same way, the third type of public toilets demanded by transgender, neither male nor female, can be called “universal” or “(for those) different.”)

And the issue carefully avoided by the partisans of the new asexual man is: to what extent are many other features usually identified with being-human, features like art, creativity, consciousness, etc., dependent on the antagonism that constitutes the sexual? This is why the addition of “asexual” to the series of sexual positions listed by the partisans of LGBT+ is crucial and unavoidable: the endeavor to liberate sexuality from all “binary” oppressions to set it free in its entire polymorphous perversity, necessarily ends up in the abandoning of the very sphere of sexuality – the liberation OF sexuality has to end up in the liberation (of humanity) FROM sexuality.

Sexuality also provides the basic matrix of the dialectical reversal of failure into success. Since France is the land of love and seduction, no wonder French cuisine, the paradigm of high cuisine, works in this way: is the origin of many of its famous dishes or drinks not that, when they wanted to produce a standard piece of food or drink, something went wrong, but then they realized that this failure can be re-sold as success? They were making cheese in the usual way, but then the cheese got rotten and infected, smelling bad, and they found this monstrosity (measured by the usual standards) charming in its own way; they were making wine in the usual way when something went wrong with the fermentation, and so they began to produce champagne ... And is this not exactly how our (human) sexuality works? Something goes terribly wrong (measured by the standards of simple instinctual mating), but this failure is then endorsed and cultivated as the resource of new sexual pleasures. Can we imagine anything more stupid (from the standpoint of successful reproduction) than the tradition of courtly love in which the completion of the sexual act is endlessly postponed? So how could courtly love become the model of high eroticism? And what about our perverted games in which a particular object or gesture which should be constrained to a subordinated moment of erotic

foreplay becomes the central feature, the focus of libidinal intensity which eclipses the big procreative Act? Is this dimension of erotic mediation not threatened by a direct brain-to-brain link?

In the British TV series *Doc Martin* which takes place in a small Cornish seaside village, the dates between the two main characters, Martin, a doctor who has moved there from London, and Louisa, a teacher at the local school, repeatedly go wrong because of his distant attitude (after kissing her, he tells her that there must be something wrong with her stomach because of her bad breath, etc.), so she breaks off with him and they politely ignore each other, limiting their interaction to the necessary minimum. When, after one such cold encounter, he leaves her house, he just turns around near the entrance, approaches her again and says with a desperate voice “Marry me!,” to which she quickly replies “Yes,” and they passionately embrace ... There is no gradual warming up, no patient work to repair the broken ties: when things go wrong between the two of them, their predicament is reduced to the bare fact that they really love each other, the fact which explodes in all its naked force. This is how success (the couple’s triumphant reunion) can only take place after and through a series of failures.

The cliffhanger finale of the second season of the TV series *Succession* (2019) is another superb example of such a reversal. Logan Roy, the patriarch of his super-rich family and the boss of the large media corporation Waystar Royco, gathers on his yacht his three sons and a daughter, plus some other top managers, in the final countdown to the shareholder meeting that will determine the company’s ownership. They all know that, due to a big sex-exploitation scandal, a “blood sacrifice” will have to be performed, i.e., a top member of the family (main shareholders suggest Logan himself) will have to be sacrificed. He or she should publicly state that he is solely responsible for the scandal and thereby assume full responsibility since, as he will state in his confession, nobody else at the top knew about it. The previous evening, Logan has a private conversation with Kendall, his second oldest son, who is primed to lead the company after him. Although the relationship between the two has always been full of tensions, Logan tells him that he really appreciates his ingenuity and intelligence; but when Kendall asks

him if he ever considered him as his successor at the top of the corporation, Logan says that Kendall nonetheless lacks a key feature of the head of a corporation, the readiness to kill, to ruthlessly destroy the opponent when this is needed. So when the family is gathered, Logan informs them that Kendall will be sacrificed: he will have to appear at a senate hearing and assume all responsibility, thereby saving his family's company. Kendall graciously agrees to perform this act, but when he appears at the hearing, he turns into a killer, denouncing Logan, his own father, as being solely responsible for the scandal and for other illegal activities in the corporation, plus announcing that he will soon make public documents proving all of this. The reversal comes in the final seconds when we see Logan (who watches Kendall's public statement on the TV) with a mysterious smile of satisfaction – what does this smile mean? Brian Cox (who plays Logan) explained it in an interview with *Vulture*: “There was a certain inevitability to it ... Logan is really setting Kendall up to become the man he has not been.” This ties back into the conversation the previous evening where Logan informs Kendall of his blood-sacrificedom, and where he refers to the prophecy where a son was annihilated so brutally that he would rise again:

Logan knew in order to sacrifice himself, he would have to do it through his family. He figured that the one chance he had was to make Kendall into the killer. That's why, at the end, he smiles. He's achieved what he was after. “My son has come of age. He's now officially a killer” ... Once Logan received the death sentence, it was important to him who'd deliver the death. He wanted to keep it within the family, as opposed to it coming from outside of the family. The smile is him saying, “Finally, my son is stepping up to the plate, doing what he needs to do to run a business. Finally, he's the heir apparent to Waystar Royco.”<sup>6</sup>

In short, Logan knew that he himself would have to be sacrificed in order to save the company, and his gesture of sacrificing Kendall is well calculated: he knows that Kendall will betray him and turn against him, and that by performing this act, Kendall will become a killer, thereby acquiring the quality he lacked in order to be the next boss of the corporation. So the true sacrifice is not Kendall's but

Logan's, and the only question that remains open is: was Kendall himself aware of this double game, i.e., was the entire plan coordinated between father and son, or did Kendall really think that he was to be sacrificed? If we follow Logan's impeccable logic, Kendall's strike had to be sincere: the top had to be sacrificed, but to keep the company in the family, the killing strike had to come from the family itself; and to make the strike believable for the public, it had to appear that the killer (Kendall) was sincere ... If Logan's plan is to succeed, he has to be betrayed for real, not just as part of some intricate family game.<sup>7</sup>

Such a positive spin of a failure can best be illustrated by the loop of symbolic representation: a subject endeavors to adequately represent itself, this representation fails, and the subject *is* the result of this failure. Recall what one might be tempted to call the "Hugh-Grant-paradox" (referring to the famous scene from *Four Weddings and a Funeral*): the hero tries to articulate his love to the beloved, he gets caught in stumbling and confused repetitions, and it is this very failure to deliver his message of love in a perfect way that bears witness to its authenticity ... This paradox makes it clear why, as Hegel put it in his *Phenomenology*, we can say our speech and our labor "express the inner too much as we can say that they express it too little. Too much – because the inner itself breaks out in these expressions, no opposition remains between them and the inner; they do not merely provide an expression of the inner, they immediately provide the inner itself. Too little – because in speech and action the inner makes itself into an other and thereby abandons itself to the mercy of the element of transformation, which twists the spoken word and the accomplished deed and makes something else out of them than what they, as the actions of this determinate individual, are in and for themselves."<sup>8</sup> They express it too little because they cannot ever capture adequately our inner intention: we always fail to put into words what we wanted to say. Simultaneously, they express it too much because in and through this very failure they express more than we wanted to say, the truth of what we subjectively meant. We may complement Hegel here: this "too much" has two aspects, it can refer to the socially determined "objective" meaning of our speech (we may mean something as sincere praise

but the predominant use of language makes it a cold cynical appraisal – we don't control the effects of our speech), as well as to the deeper truth about the speaking subject itself (the subject's failure to say what it really wanted to say may bring out a dimension of its desire it was not aware of). So instead of bothering with the question "Can neuralink capture the true meaning of our flow of thoughts?," we should focus on a different question: can it capture the overlapping of too little and too much indicated by Hegel, can it capture the excess produced by the failure itself?

Furthermore, it is obvious that Grant's individuality expresses itself precisely through these failures: if he were to declare his love in a perfect and smooth way, we would get a robot-like recitation. For this reason, the next question that arises is: will our individuality survive this passage into singularity? Technology has so far enhanced our individuality because it has introduced more alienation, additional layers in our exchange with others, and even alienating us from ourselves (our screen image is not directly "ourselves") – so what happens when this distance disappears? Musk's first line of defence is that, in his version of BCI, the individual is not totally immersed in it: it maintains a minimal distance from it, so that, in order to allow the machine (or, through it, another individual) to register and/or share your thoughts and feelings, you have to actively consent to it, to will it:

One concern that comes up when people hear about thought communication in particular is a potential loss of individuality. Would this make us one great hive mind with each individual brain as just another bee? Almost across the board, the experts I talked to believed it would be the opposite. We could act as one in a collaboration when it served us, but technology has thus far enhanced human individuality ... People won't be able to read your thoughts – you would have to will it. If you don't will it, it doesn't happen. Just like if you don't will your mouth to talk, it doesn't talk.

But how does Musk know that an individual will maintain this minimal distance? Remember that BCI works "objectively": our brain is wired, linked to a machine which, strictly speaking, doesn't "read our

thoughts” but the processes in our brain which are the neuronal correlate of our thoughts; consequently, since when I think, I am not aware of the neuronal processes in my brain, how should I know if I am plugged in or not? Consequently, is it not much more reasonable to surmise that, when I am plugged into BCI, I will not even be aware when my inner life is transparent to others? In short, does BCI not offer itself as the ideal medium of (political) control of the inner life of individuals? As is the case with all inventions that pose a threat to human freedom, their promoters try to obfuscate the issue by emphasizing dazzling examples of how such inventions might improved the lives of incapacitated individuals – here is a typical report: “Paralysed man walks using mind-controlled exoskeleton. French patient’s breakthrough could lead to brain-controlled wheelchairs, say experts.”<sup>9</sup> No mention of how mind-controlled machines imply also machine-control of mind itself.

Already in May 2002, it was reported that scientists at New York University had attached a computer chip able to send signals directly to a rat’s brain, so that it would be possible to control the rat (i.e., determine the direction in which it would run) by means of a steering mechanism (in the same way one as runs a remote-controlled toy car). For the first time, the “will” of a living animal agent, its “spontaneous” decisions about the movements it will make, were taken over by an external machine. Of course, the big philosophical question here is: how did the unfortunate rat “experience” its movement which was effectively decided from the outside? Did it continue to “experience” it as something spontaneous (i.e., was it totally unaware that its movements were being steered?), or was it aware that “something is wrong,” that another external power was deciding its movements? Even more crucial is to apply the same reasoning to an identical experiment performed with humans (which, ethical questions notwithstanding, shouldn’t be much more complicated, technically speaking, than in the case of the rat). In the case of the rat, one can argue that one should not apply to it the human category of “experience,” while, in the case of a human being, one should ask this question. So, again, will a steered human being continue to “experience” his movements as something spontaneous? Will he remain totally unaware that his movements

are steered, or will he become aware that “something is wrong,” that another external power is deciding his movements? And, how, precisely, will this “external power” appear – as something “inside me,” an unstoppable inner drive, or as a simple external coercion? If the subject will remain totally unaware that their spontaneous behavior is steered from outside, can one really go on pretending that this has no consequences for our notion of free will? Most of those who reflect on neuralink focus on the individuality of my experience – will I lose it or not when I am immersed in singularity? But there is the opposite option: what if I retain my individuality in experience and don’t even know that I am controlled and steered?

When people reflect on the implications of BCI, they usually focus on how our immersion in Singularity will affect us, making us a *homo deus*: like a divine being I will be able to move things and trigger processes in reality by merely thinking about it – the German idealists called this overlapping of perception and activity *intellectual intuition*, a perception which creates what it perceives. Only gods can do this: our finite minds are forever constrained by the gap that separates thinking or perceiving from acting. But we should rather take a step back and ask the question: who will control the chips in our brain which sustains the BCI? Chips are cheap ... Perhaps the saddest aspect of the vision of neuralink is the cynical opportunistic calculus that sustains it: we (humans) gave birth to a higher form of intelligence which, if left alone to deploy its powers, will reduce us to gorillas in a zoo: “Most posthumanists agree that it would be ironic if humankind were surpassed by beings that humans made possible, and tragic if such post-humans did away with humankind altogether. Still, more than a few posthumanists assert without nostalgia that evolutionary development is indifferent to the fate of what came before. For them, the prospect of dramatically improving ourselves in the process of giving birth to something far greater than humankind more than justifies taking risks<sup>10</sup>.” The only choice for us to avoid this fate is to join the winner, to leave behind our humanity and immerse ourselves in Singularity ... But will all of humanity as a whole “join the winner,” or will the emergence of Singularity give rise to new unheard-of forms of domination, so that (post)humans themselves will be divided into new winners and losers?



### 3

## The Impasse of Soviet Tech-Gnosis

This brings us to the topic neglected by contemporary transhumanists: what about the social consequences of the passage into Singularity? What kind of social order does its rise imply? It is clear that contemporary liberal democracy with its individualism is doomed in this case – so what will replace it? Transhumanists limit themselves to occasional warnings that the other side of the prospect of *homo deus* is unheard-of possibilities of social and direct mental control. But there was, back in the 1920s, already a strong tendency of post-humanism in the USSR: the so-called “bio-cosmism,” a strange combination of vulgar materialism and gnostic spirituality which formed occult shadow-ideology, the obscene secret teaching, of the Soviet Marxism. Repressed out of the public sight in the central period of the Soviet state, bio-cosmism was openly propagated only in the first and in the last two decades of Soviet rule; its main theses were: the goals of religion (collective paradise, overcoming of all suffering, full individual immortality, resurrection of the dead, victory over time and death, conquest of space far beyond the solar system) can be realized in terrestrial life through the development of modern science and technology. In the future, not only would sexual difference be abolished, with the rise of chaste post-humans reproducing themselves through direct bio-technical reproduction; it would also be possible to resurrect all the dead of the past (establishing their biological formula through their remains and then re-engendering them – at that time, DNA was not yet known ...), thus even erasing all past injustices, “undoing” past suffering and destruction. In this bright bio-political Communist future, not only humans, but also animals, all living beings, would participate in a directly collectivized Reason of the cosmos ... Exemplary is here the vision of Trotsky:

What is man? He is by no means a finished or harmonious being. No, he is still a highly awkward creature. Man, as an animal, has not evolved by plan but spontaneously, and has accumulated many contradictions. The question of how to educate and regulate, of how to improve and complete the physical and spiritual construction of man, is a colossal problem which can only be understood on the basis of socialism ... To produce a new, “improved version” of man – that is the future task of communism. And for that we first have to find out everything about man, his anatomy, his physiology and that part of his physiology which is called his psychology. Man must look at himself and see himself as a raw material, or at best as a semi-manufactured product, and say: “At last, my dear homo sapiens, I will work on you.”<sup>1</sup>

These were not just idiosyncratic theoretical principles, but expressions of a true mass movement in art, architecture, psychology, pedagogy, and organizational sciences, comprising hundreds of thousands of people. The officially supported cult of Taylorism, whose most radical exponent was Aleksei Gastev, a Bolshevik engineer and poet who used the term “biomechanics” as early as 1922, explored a vision of society in which man and machine would merge. Gastev ran the Institute of Labor, which carried out experiments to train workers to act like machines. He saw the mechanization of man as the next step in evolution, envisaging

a utopia where “people” would be replaced by “proletarian units” identified by ciphers such as “A,B,C, or 325,075,0, and so on” ... A “mechanized collectivism” would “take the place of the individual personality in the psychology of the proletariat.” There would no longer be a need for emotions, and the human soul would no longer be measured “by a shout or a smile but by a pressure gauge or a speedometer.”<sup>2</sup>

One should be careful not to miss the theological implications of this vision: the other side of the replacement of individual personality with a new form of collective awareness, i.e., of the obliteration of the barrier that separates my mind from others, is the strengthening of the barrier that separates my mind from my bodily (self-)experience:

I am no longer fully embodied, I observe my body in an emotionless stance, reading its messages as signs of a machine (I don't feel heat, I register it as a number on my bodily thermometer, etc.). What we get here is the materialist version of the redemption from the Fall, something vaguely similar to the unique theology elaborated by Nicholas Malebranche, a disciple of Descartes, who dropped Descartes's ridiculous reference to the pineal gland in order to explain the coordination between the material and the spiritual substance, i.e. body and soul. How, then, are we to explain their coordination, if there is no contact between the two, no point at which a soul can act causally on a body or vice versa? Since the two causal networks (that of ideas in my mind and that of bodily interconnections) are totally independent, the only solution is that a third, true Substance (god) continuously coordinates and mediates between the two, sustaining the semblance of continuity: when I think about raising my hand and my hand effectively rises, my thought causes the raising of my hand not directly but only "occasionally" – upon noticing my thought directed at raising my hand, god sets in motion the other, material, causal chain which leads to my hand effectively being raised. If we replace "God" with the big Other, the symbolic order, we can see the closeness of occasionalism to Lacan's position: as Lacan put it in his polemics against Aristotle in *Television*,<sup>3</sup> the relationship between soul and body is never direct, since the big Other always interposes itself between the two. Occasionalism is thus essentially a name for the "arbitrary of the signifier," for the gap that separates the network of ideas from the network of bodily (real) causality, for the fact that it is the big Other which accounts for the coordination of the two networks, so that, when my body bites an apple, my soul experiences a pleasurable sensation. This same gap is targeted by the ancient Aztec priest who organizes human sacrifices to ensure that the sun will rise again: the human sacrifice is here an appeal to god to sustain the coordination between the two series, the bodily necessity and the concatenation of symbolic events. "Irrational" as the Aztec priest's sacrificing may appear, its underlying premise is far more insightful than our commonplace intuition according to which the coordination between body and soul is direct, i.e. it is

“natural” for me to have a pleasurable sensation when I bite an apple since this sensation is caused directly by the apple: what gets lost is the intermediary role of the big Other in guaranteeing the coordination between reality and our mental experience of it. And is it not the same with our immersion in Virtual Reality? When I raise my hand in order to push an object in the virtual space, this object effectively moves – my illusion, of course, is that it was the movement of my hand which directly caused the dislocation of the object, i.e. in my immersion, I overlook the intricate mechanism of computerized coordination, homologous to the role of god guaranteeing the coordination between the two series in occasionalism.<sup>4</sup>

It is a well-known fact that the “Close the door” button in most elevators is a totally dysfunctional placebo, which is placed there just to give the individuals the impression that they are somehow participating, contributing to the speed of the elevator journey – when we push this button, the door closes in exactly the same time as when we just pressed the floor button without “speeding up” the process by pressing also the “Close the door” button. This extreme and clear case of fake participation is an appropriate metaphor of the participation of individuals in our “postmodern” political process. And this is occasionalism at its purest: according to Malebranche, we are all the time pressing such buttons, and it is god’s incessant activity that coordinates between them and the event that follows (the door closing), while we think the event results from our pushing the button

...

Occasionalism also enables us to throw new light on the exact status of the Fall: Adam was brought to ruin and banished from Paradise not because he was simply led astray by Eve’s sensuality; the point is rather that he made a philosophical mistake and “regressed” from occasionalism to vulgar sensual empiricism according to which material objects directly, without the mediation of the big Other (God), affect our senses – the Fall is primarily a question of Adam’s philosophical convictions. That is to say, prior to the Fall, Adam fully mastered his body and maintained a distance from it: since he was well aware that the connection between his

soul and his body was contingent and only occasional, he was at any moment able to suspend it, to cut himself off and to feel neither pain nor pleasure. Pain and pleasure were not ends in themselves; they served only to provide information about what was bad or good for the survival of his body. The “Fall” occurred the moment Adam excessively (i.e., beyond the scope needed to provide the information necessary for survival in his natural environs) yielded to his senses, the moment his senses affected him to such an extent that he lost his distance from them and was distracted from pure thought. The object responsible for the Fall, of course, was Eve: Adam fell when the view of Eve naked momentarily distracted him and led him astray into believing that Eve in herself, directly and not only occasionally, was the cause of his sexual pleasure. Eve is responsible for the Fall insofar as she gives rise to the philosophical error of sensual realism. And, as was already pointed out by Saint Augustine, the punishment, the price Adam had to pay for his Fall, was, quite appropriately, that he was no longer able to master fully his body – the erection of his phallus escaped his control.

All the main ingredients of posthumanism are here: the passage to post-human stage through technological manipulation of humans; the idea that, in this way, humans will become divine (the notion of *bogograditel'stvo* – “construction of god” – promoted by Lunacharsky and even Gorky); the idea that, with the passage to posthumanity, we will leave behind sexuality (as, in some versions, the last bastion of bourgeois ideology); and, finally, the idea that, in this post-human stage, communication through media will be replaced by a direct link between individual minds. Andrei Platonov, who was part of this movement, but simultaneously cast a critical eye on it, wrote a short story “Eternal Tract” in which

one of the protagonists, a scientist called Matissen, creates a device that can transmit simple commands over a distance. The machine translates electromagnetic waves generated in a brain into a command and passes this command to another machine, person or even to nature ... However, his tests result in environmental disaster and eventually, over the course of the experiment, his death.<sup>5</sup>

The paradox which cannot but strike the eye is that Soviet high-tech gnosticism exploded in the (material) conditions of extreme poverty (the Soviet Union during and after the civil war). Platonov elaborated an entire (implicit) “ontology of poor life” to provide the contours of the way of life of those he calls “less than proletarians.” But what if this should not surprise us? What if precisely the epochs of exploding poverty and chaos give rise to utopian explosions? And what if today we witness a similar “coincidence of the opposites,” with the dreams of Singularity and the rise of homeless refugees as the two sides of the same coin, as yet another example of the Hegelian “infinite judgment” (link between the “lowest” and the “highest”) that defines our era? Bogdanov plays here the key role as a full participant in the movement, but with a critical distance, so his work deserves a closer look. What we should focus on is the shift that occurs in his work somewhere in the late 1920s. Until that point, he saw the material base of “poor life” in what he called “labour of life,” the incessant struggle for survival. When we are caught in the “labour of life,” we are not really alive, we are just “involved in life!”: “In the labouring being there is no time to live, or, as the reservist Komyagin says: ‘After all, I am not living. I have only been involved in life’. It seems that many of Platonov’s characters do not live, but are only ‘involved in life’, i.e. struggling with the state of poor life.” Here comes the first of Bogdanov’s specific pins: “labour of life” includes sexuality which therefore brings no redemption and remains another burden in the struggle for survival – sexuality is here reduced to the “labour of social reproduction”:

In his early essay “Proletarian Culture”, Platonov writes: “Sex became the main, central feeling in the struggle for survival, a soul of the person. And implementation of the law of sex became the highest blessing of the person”. From this it follows that gender, biological reproduction, sex and the nuclear family are means of immortality in capitalist society. Opposed to the unconscious struggle for individual survival in acts of biological reproduction, communism is the common life of the new sexless human.

If even sexuality does not indicate a way out of the labour of life, where, then, can we locate a break or an interruption in the

continuum of laboring and production? Platonov's solution is *toská*, a Russian word mobilized by him to designate the experience which occurs when

the working process forms a blank space, a pause. It is literally the emptiness, a void, which is formed by the lack of labour. This emptiness produces a thought, whereas absolute fullness (preoccupation) with labour does not leave a space for a pause or a gap for thinking ... Platonov uses a specific Russian word, *toská*, to describe this existential state or feeling of enslavement within poor life ... *Toská* is close to the English terms "melancholy" and "longing", but it has no cause, object or direction.

The status of poor life is thus profoundly ambiguous: it is the lowest, constant struggle for survival, but it also functions on the verge of withdrawal from active life and as such opens up the space for breaking out of the continuum of laboring and production – in contrast to proletarians, nomadic Others don't work, their despair cannot find solace in productive engagement. And, again, one should not miss the cosmic dimension of *toská*: "But why, Nikita, do the fields lie there so boringly? Can it be that *toská* is inside of the whole world – and there's a five-year plan only in ourselves?" *Toská* is not just a human disposition, it permeates entire reality, it is present even in the inertia of abandoned fields. For this reason, one should not focus too much on the emotional aspect of *toská* (is it despair and melancholy? etc.): it is rather thinking at its zero level, a pure thought as the disconnection from the laborious life cycle:

Platonov seems to juxtapose the labouring being that has no breaks, on the one hand, and thinking as a pause that produces emptiness and a "timeless" sense of *toská*, on the other ... The end of time is the end of labouring being, and *toská* reveals the necessity of Communism as the only means to overcome the endless time of reproduction.

In this radical politico-cosmic vision, there will be no *toská* in Communism, since Communism leaves behind the very condition which gives birth to *toská*: it is the end of time as we know it, insofar as time is for us, for our historical experience, time of loss and lack,



of suffering and striving. As such, Communism is a cosmic event, not just a social transformation, as radical as it can be: everything that exists – including animals and plants– must be liberated from poor life ...<sup>6</sup> However, in the mid-1920s Platonov became disillusioned with the viability of this cosmic-social short-circuit (a social revolution that redeems nature itself), he

criticizes the possibility of technical progress and the overcoming of class contradictions by means of a pure form of consciousness, concluding instead that cyclical production and reproduction, organisation and disorganisation is the ontological precondition of all social forms ... the environment has to be arranged in such a way as to take into account these laws of organisation, in order to be able to organise the social world not against, but in accordance with them. Social life depends on the spontaneity and negativity of natural cycles. Therefore the labouring being can only be negated, never fully abolished. This means that Platonov does not employ the idea of sublation (*Aufheben*).

The term *Aufheben* should be read here in a non-Hegelian way: in Platonov's original vision, sexuality is to be "sublated" in the naïve sense of actual annihilation: there will be no sexuality in the posthuman Communism, while for Hegel, "sublation" is a negation which maintains the key dimension of the negated phenomenon and elevates it into a higher level (say, for Hegel, animal coupling is sublated in human sexuality), and it is exactly such a more Hegelian sublation of sexuality that Platonov imagines in his second phase: "the question is to be solved not in the total abolition of sex, but in the abolition of the laboriousness of life that forces women to function as commodities and as birth-machines." In the exemplary work of his "mature" period, the short novel *Soul* (1935), although the typically Platonovian utopian group of Others is still here – the "nation," a desert community of marginals who lost the will to live – the coordinates have totally changed. The hero is now a Stalinist educator, schooled in Moscow; he returns to the desert to introduce the "nation" to scientific and cultural progress and thus restore their will to live. (Platonov, of course, remains faithful to his ambiguity: at the novel's end; the hero has to accept that he cannot teach others

anything.) This shift is signaled by the radically changed role of sexuality: for the Platonov of the 1920s, sexuality was the anti-utopian “dirty” power of inertia, while here, it is rehabilitated as the privileged path to spiritual maturity – although he fails as the educator, the hero finds spiritual solace in sexual love, so that it is as if the “nation” is almost reduced to the background of the creation of a sexual couple. Platonov comes here dangerously close to the Hollywood formula of the production of a couple discernible even in a late Western like *Dances With Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990), the story of a US Army lieutenant, John J. Dunbar, who abandons his unit and goes to live in wilderness in search of a more authentic life; he joins there a Lakota tribe and falls in love with Stands With A Fist, a white woman who has lived among them since she was kidnapped by them as a child. The tribesmen assert that they do not see him as a white man, but as a Sioux warrior called Dances With Wolves. But, at the winter camp, Dunbar decides to leave with Stands With A Fist because his continuing presence would endanger the tribe pursued by the US Army, so that, at the end, a happy couple is created and returns to civilization while the nomadic Lakota nation just disappears; it withdraws into an unknown territory. The same goes even for *Awakenings* (Penny Marshall, 1990) where the “nation” of catatonic patients is resuscitated to life by their doctor (Robin Williams), a shy person afraid to ask a woman for a date. At the film’s end, the doctor asks a nurse for a date and she gladly accepts, so that the patients can return to catatonia. It is not the patients who are truly awakened, but the doctor himself. And, as a further proof of the link between Hollywood and the High Stalinism, let us mention Chiaureli’s infamous *The Fall of Berlin* (1948), the supreme case of a Stalinist war epic, the story of the Soviet victory over Hitler’s Germany. The film begins in 1941, just prior to the German assault on the USSR; the hero, a Stakhanovite steel worker in love with a local teacher, but too shy to approach her directly, is awarded the Stalin prize and received by Stalin in his datcha. In a scene which was cut after 1953 and then lost, after the official congratulations, Stalin notices a nervous uneasiness in the hero and asks him what is wrong. The hero confesses his love problems to Stalin and Stalin advises him on how to win the girl’s heart: recite poetry to her, etc.

Back home, the hero succeeds in seducing the girl; however, at the very moment when he is carrying her in his arms into the grass (to perform the sexual act, in all probability), bombs from German planes start to fall all around – it is now 22 June 1941. In the ensuing confusion, the girl is taken prisoner by the Germans and taken to a labor camp near Berlin, while the hero joins the Red Army, fighting in the first lines to get back to his love. At the film's end, when the jubilant crowd of camp prisoners liberated by the Red Army mingles with the Russian soldiers, a plane lands on an open field nearby; Stalin himself steps out and walks towards the crowd which greets him passionately. At that very point, as if again mediated by Stalin's help, the lovelorn couple is reunited: the girl notices the hero in the crowd; before embracing him, she approaches Stalin and asks him if she can give him a kiss ... *The Fall of Berlin* is effectively the story of a couple reunited: World War II serves as an obstacle to be overcome so that the hero can reach his love, and the role of Stalin is that of a magician and matchmaker who wisely leads the couple to its reunion ...

The insistence on the strict Hegelian meaning of sublation is here not a point of pedantry: what the "mature" Platonov envisages is precisely a Hegelian *Aufhebung* of the "labour of life" which includes sexual reproduction. In Communism also, social life will continue to "depend on the spontaneity and negativity of natural cycles. Therefore the labouring being can only be negated, never fully abolished." In strict Hegelese, the "labouring being" will precisely not be directly negated but "abolished" in the sense of sublation: it will lose its immediate character of struggle for survival and reappear as "mediated," as the moment of a higher social totality which follows spiritual goals; the same goes for sex which will become a mediated moment of intersubjective spiritual fulfillment ...

However, two problems immediately arise here. The first is that, in capitalism, such an *Aufhebung* already takes place: a capitalist is not motivated in his self-reproduction by a struggle for survival. As Marx saw clearly (see the Hegelian references of his description of the circulation of capital), in its self-reproduction, "capital" behaves like a Hegelian Idea, the purpose of its reproduction is not the survival of workers but its own expanded reproduction (measured by growing

profit). Which is why the critique of capitalism as a system of egotism totally misses the point: a true capitalist is not a hedonist, he or she can even live a very ascetic life, sacrificing everything, all his or her pleasures, for the smooth functioning of the reproduction of capital. We should thus, as Hegel and Marx did long ago, distinguish between two “natures,” the immediate “natural nature” (biological life) and the “second nature,” a social product which acquires a fake autonomy and dominates individuals as their fate. And it is similar with sexuality: human sexuality is by definition never just a means of survival (reproduction), it is by definition always “denaturalized,” imposing on its biological foundation its own rhythm. Even if capitalism occasionally throws millions into poverty, its logic is not that of a “poor life” but of a life which generates poverty as the other side of its production of excessive wealth.

The second problem, crucial for us here: neuralink (Singularity) is so unsettling for a Hegelian as well as for late Platonov and other proponents of *Aufhebung*, of the “mediation” of a lower stage into the moment of a higher totality, because it does (or at least promises to do) something which Hegel doesn’t even consider. For Hegel, all spiritual life, all actual existence of Spirit, remains rooted in our finite bodily existence, in our material historical reality: there is no independent realm of Spirit; Spirit only exists in human culture; language is its medium. While neuralink also remains rooted in material reality (digital networks, neurobiology), and while neuralink is in some sense scientific-materialist reductionism carried to an extreme, it also reaches the extreme at the other end: in a great leap forward, it opens up the prospect of a direct link between minds, of a communication without a material medium of expression. So, to put it in Hegelese again, neuralink promises to enact its own infinite judgment in which the lowest (material reality of neural and digital networks) and the highest (mind) “coincide.” The prospect of pure thought is thereby opened up: a thought which will be “pure” in the precise sense of a direct link between minds without the need for any communicational mediation. Is this not also a version of Communism in the sense of a space of directly shared thoughts?

In mature Platonov’s vision, Communism is no longer a version of Singularity, and *toská* remains operative in it in the usual sense of

despair at the laborious life, not in the absolute sense. Perhaps, however, we can nonetheless read the basic situation of his masterpiece, *The Foundation Pit*, as a kind of negative of the cosmic notion of Communism. What if the foundation pit – this gigantic hole in the earth which will never be filled in with the new Communist building, this symbol of meaningless expenditure of labor which plays no role in the struggle for survival or for a better life – is a spectacular monument to *toská* as the indelible condition of our lives?

## 4

# Singularity

## The Gnostic Turn

The key role of *toská* in Platonov's idea of Communism brings us back from politics to theology, to the theological implications of certain visions not only of the wired brain but also of Communism. Today, this theological dimension of the wired brain is making a spectacular return, just (as expected) deprived of the Communist underpinning. The sublime obverse of Musk's cynical insight "let's try to catch up with the machines so that we will not become apes in a zoo" is the gnostic New Age reading of Singularity as not only the new stage of post-humanity but a key cosmic event, the accomplishment of the divine self-actualization: in Singularity, not only we, humans, become divine, god himself becomes fully divine. Insofar as Singularity also implies a kind of synchronicity of minds, no wonder it calls for theosophical speculations. That is to say, when synchronicity is debated, the obscurantist temptation is almost irresistible – no wonder Jung loved this notion.<sup>1</sup> Michael Zimmerman's essay on this topic provides a concise formulation of this hypothesis elaborated in popular terms by Ray Kurzweil:

the confluence of nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, robotics, and genetic engineering will soon produce posthuman beings that will far surpass us in power and intelligence. Just as black holes constitute a "singularity" from which no information can escape, posthumans will constitute a "singularity:" whose aims and capacities lie beyond our ken. Technological posthumanists, whether wittingly or unwittingly, draw upon the long-standing Christian discourse of "theosis," according to which humans are capable of being God or god-like. From St. Paul and Luther to Hegel and Kurzweil, the idea of human self-deification plays a

prominent role. Hegel in particular emphasizes that God becomes wholly actualized only in the process by which humanity achieves absolute consciousness. Kurzweil agrees that God becomes fully actual only through historical processes that illuminate and thus transform the entire universe. The difference is that for Kurzweil and many other posthumanists, our offspring – the posthumans – will carry out this extraordinary process.<sup>2</sup>

Or, to quote Kurzweil himself from *The Singularity is Near*: “Our civilization will ... expand outward, turning all the dumb matter and energy we encounter into sublimely intelligent – transcendent – matter and energy. So in a sense, we can say that the Singularity will ultimately infuse the universe with spirit.”<sup>3</sup> In short, as Zimmerman notes, Singularity is for Kurzweil “a turning point in the evolutionary process that will give rise to extraordinary beings capable of awaking the entire material universe. Such an awakening may be viewed as actualizing a potential present from the very beginning. By capitalizing ‘Singularity’, posthumanists suggest that the event is not merely important, but numinous, that is, possessing what amounts to a sacred dimension. Posthumanists such as Kurzweil represent the future in ways consistent with at least some conceptions of God.”

Therein resides the gnostic hypothesis of transhumanists:

post-humans will eventually transform the entire universe into an all-powerful intelligence resembling in important respects the monotheistic God. Kurzweil’s God does not transcend nature, but instead brings nature to the zenith of its intrinsic possibilities ... only through humankind can such divine self-consciousness occur. After positing an Other to itself in the form of nature, which is Geist extended in space, Geist subsequently manifests itself as conscious humankind, which then sets about to know and thus to assimilate Otherness constituted by extended nature. Material things are “petrified intelligence” extended in space, whereas consciousness is liquefied intelligence unfolding through time (history). Estranged from the idea, nature is only the corpse of the understanding. Nature is, however, only implicitly the idea, and Schelling therefore called her a petrified intelligence, others even a

frozen intelligence, but God does not remain petrified and dead, the very stones cry out and raise themselves to spirit [Geist].

The Hegelian (or, more broadly, German Idealist) references are clearly spelled out here, as well as the gap that separates the idea of Singularity from the space of German Idealism. Inert material reality gets gradually spiritualized through the process of actualizing its spiritual immanent potentials. The first peak of this process is human intelligence in which Spirit becomes aware of itself, returns back to itself from its alienation/externalization in material reality. But at this stage, Spirit remains opposed to reality; it becomes aware of itself as individual consciousness opposed to material reality. In order to fully actualize itself, Spirit has to overcome this opposition and become aware of itself as the spiritual dimension, the spiritual inner life, of entire (material) reality itself. At this level, my self-consciousness overlaps with the self-consciousness of entire reality itself, or, in theological terms, my awareness of god is simultaneously the self-awareness of god himself. God is not an entity outside the process of reality which steers it from a safe distance; the process of reality is the process that takes place in god himself, it overlaps with the becoming of god himself. The difference that separates German Idealism from the theorists of Singularity is that, for German Idealists, this full unity of Spirit and reality is already achieved in philosophical speculation (or, in a more mystical version, in theosophical experience): our human self-awareness plays a central role in the cosmos itself since, in it, reality becomes aware of itself and god becomes fully actual. For theorists of Singularity, on the contrary, we, finite humans, cannot actualize the full unity of Spirit and reality – our separate individual awareness is a too strong an obstacle. Reconciliation of reality with Spirit is achieved only when we renounce our separated individuality and become one with the Spirit which permeates reality itself, when our self-consciousness experiences itself as the self-awareness of reality itself – in short, when we enter Singularity:

The engine of history, at work “behind the backs” of historical agents, is the imperative of the universe to make itself fully self-conscious. For Kurzweil, Hegel was right in many ways, but wrong



in this respect: Alpha has not become Omega, the ultimate end has not been achieved, and Geist has not yet become fully self-conscious. Vast Otherness remains to be awakened by being assimilated to divine intelligence. If a profound cosmic telos helped to generate self-conscious humankind in the first place, that same telos may be animating those who today envision and call for a post-human future ... the cosmos has brought itself to self-awareness through humankind. Eventually, humans will evolve beyond themselves by generating modes of consciousness and technology that will make possible a cosmic self-realization that has something in common with St. Paul's hope "that the Creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

What we get here is another (third) version of "Hegel was too early": first, there was the young Lukacs for whom Hegel's reconciliation was the idealist prefiguration of the actual reconciliation of subject and substance, the proletarian revolution through which the proletariat appropriates the alienated historical substance; then, there was Fukuyama for whom the ideal rational state, the conclusion of world history in which individual freedom is reconciled with organic social order, is not achieved (as Hegel thought) in rational monarchy but only in contemporary liberal democracy; finally, there are the transhumanists for whom only the prospect of Singularity opens up actual reconciliation of Spirit and reality.<sup>4</sup> The problem that arises here is, of course: what will happen in this passage with us, humans?

According to posthumanists, humankind cannot evolve in the ways required to reconstruct the universe, because the organic body is too frail for the task. Just as humankind has exterminated many species, quite possibly including other higher primates, in the process of achieving planetary dominance, post-humans may exterminate humankind to achieve galactic and even cosmic dominance, all in the quest for total selfconsciousness of a sort that we are incapable of imagining.

Some posthumanists heroically endorse this disappearance as “the only opportunity in cosmic history for self-conscious beings to move toward the Singularity.” We lose our bodily existence, but we can change the base of our existence from hardware to software: we can download our consciousness into some post-biological (digital) entity and then go on reproducing ourselves in this way indefinitely. The question remains, of course: “Would many an innocent flower, we might ask here, have to be trampled for Geist to take the leap to immortal superconsciousness?” This question can also be put in theological terms: since our Self as opposed to reality (and separated from god) is what religion describes as the Fall, could humankind regain its prelapsarian status by entering Singularity? Linked to this dilemma is another one that we have already encountered: will we retain in Singularity our individual self-awareness? Some theorists claim that Singularity does not mean total immersion in spiritual substance – we remain subjects playing with substantial content. Here is a quote from Cadell Last:

I think when we think “how would Hegel read Kurzweil?” we are left thinking that Kurzweil is kind of “Spinozan” in the sense that he desires some “immanent union” with “physical substance” (mind bringing the whole universe to life via advanced computation). However, in a Hegelian lens would it not be that we should read this Kurzweilian speculation as an “Absolute Image” (where Fichte got stuck), and instead think how “each subject may ultimately demand the creation (out of nothing) of their own universe”? Would that not be the best expression of the “absolute as substance, but also as subject?”. In this formula we avoid the trap of thinking “subjectivity will merge with other subjects” or “subjectivity will merge with the physical object”; but rather think the way in which each subject is acting in relation to its own virtual (conceptual) universe?<sup>5</sup>

In Freudian terms, Lasts’s solution is a perverse one: instead of being immersed in the divine Singularity, subjects make use of it, engage playfully with it. What makes this solution interesting is that it echoes the stance of the very last phase of Lacan’s teaching. After decades of struggle to penetrate through the Imaginary/Symbolic

cobweb of fictions to the pure Real, he conceded defeat. Adrian Johnston<sup>6</sup> brought out the intricacies and ambiguities of the “pessimist” turn which occurs at the very end of Lacan’s teaching and which culminates in his new formula of the end of psychoanalytic treatment as identification with a symptom (not its dissolving):

Passage through a concluding experience of “subjective destitution”, in which ego-level identifications as well as points of reference such as big Others and subjects supposed to know vacillate or vanish altogether, indeed is an essential, punctuating moment of the Lacanian analytic process. Nevertheless, Lacan does not consider it possible or desirable to dwell permanently in such an analysis-terminating destitute state. He sees it as both appropriate and inevitable that egos, big Others, subjects supposed to know, and the like will reconstitute themselves for the analysand in the aftermath of his/her analysis. Hopefully, the versions of these reconstituted in the wake of and in response to analysis will be better, more livable versions for the analysand.

What we get here is some kind of “postmodern” Lacan: we can confront the Real only in rare moments of lucidity, but this extreme experience cannot last, we have to return to our ordinary life of dwelling in semblances, in symbolic fictions ... And is it not the same with Christian atheism? The obvious reproach to Badiou, me, and other “Christian atheists” is: why do we not assert materialism directly, why do we need a detour through religion? Christian atheists claim that we cannot leave religion behind, that we need its mirage to transgress it repeatedly – or, to put it in Kantian terms, religion is not just a historical phenomenon but a kind of transcendental illusion immanent to the human mind. So instead of erasing god out of the picture, the only way is to learn how to “make use of” Dieu comme le Nom-du-Père.” In what precise sense, then, are *les non-dupes errent* – those who pretend not to be duped by the religious illusion – in the wrong? Johnston indicates the way:

Lacan’s paraphrase of Dostoyevsky, according to which “if God is dead, then nothing is permitted”, seems to convey the sense that

permanent radical atheism is undesirable as per the strict Lacanian definition of desire. De Kesel claims that, for Lacan, religion enjoys the virtue of sustaining desire. If so, does Lacan's version of analysis really seek to do away with theism, religiosity, and the like? ... The libidinal economy of the unconscious, centered on desire with its fundamental fantasies involving objet petit a, is sustained by the Law of God as the dead father and/or Name-of-the-Father. If this God dies, then the entire economy He supports collapses (i.e., "nothing is permitted"). In *Television*, Lacan, speaking of matters Oedipal, remarks, "Even if the memories of familial suppression weren't true, they would have to be invented, and that is certainly done." Paraphrasing this remark, one might say that, by Lacan's lights, if God is dead, then, at least for libidinal reasons, he would have to be resurrected – and that has certainly been done.

So does "if god doesn't exist, then everything is prohibited" not mean that, in order to sustain our desire, we need something like god (even if it is only in its more neutral irreligious form, as subject supposed to know)? How to combine this with Lacan's claim that atheism is the pinnacle of psychoanalytic experience? Is Lacan's line that the name-of-the-Father should not be abolished but made use of the only way out? Furthermore, does something similar not hold for the (eventual) passage into Singularity? Does this passage not imply that, in some sense, the Symbolic will fall into the Real and thus the (human) desire will be killed? So do we not here also confront the alternative: either we make this passage and thus risk losing it all, or (in parallel with the very last Lacan) we abstain from it and stick to the domain of symbolic fictions? Should then "do not enter Singularity" be elevated into a new version of the prohibition of incest? What this further implies is that, far from standing for a step into the divine dimension (as the New Age readers of Singularity claim), the passage into Singularity would have implied its loss, the abolition of all transcendence, the utter vulgarization/flattening of our existence? Johnston reads Lacan's solution as an escape into perversion, into a perverse transgressing game: you posit the big Other to violate/kill him, with the implication that prior to his death he was alive/full/non-barred:

The paradoxical status of Christianity as the religion of atheism, a status Lacan joins everyone from Hegel to Žižek in assigning to this monotheism, is integral to what makes it perverse in the strictest of senses by Lacan's reckoning. The Lacanian pervert plays a double game. On the one hand, he/she registers, at least unconsciously, the signifier of the barred Other,  $S(\bar{A})$ , namely, indications that there is no locus of omniscience, omnipotence, perfection, and the like. On the other hand, the pervert repeatedly sets about, in reaction to this registration of  $S(\bar{A})$ , trying in one or more ways to plaster over the cracks in le grand Autre (i.e., "plugging the hole in the Other"). As the religion of atheism, Christianity simultaneously both reveals that le grand Autre n'existe pas ("Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?", etc.) as well as conceals this revelation through various means (denying God's death, deifying/fetishizing Jesus as Christ-the-God, and so on).

The key to this paradox is provided by a passage in Lacan's seminar *Encore* where he claims that the trick of the prohibition of incest is to present immanent impossibility as the result of an (ultimately external) prohibition – as if, if mother were not prohibited, it would be possible to fully enjoy incest.<sup>7</sup> Prohibition thus gives rise to the illusory hope that, if we violate it, we can get the Thing – to put it simply, the fact that mother is prohibited masks the fact that mother herself is already not THE Mother/Thing. Heterosexual men choose women as mother's replacement to obfuscate the fact that mother herself is not Mother.

So it seems that, in his very last period, Lacan himself accepts this game: we need fictions and illusions to survive. So, instead of pursuing the path of trying to reach the pure Real (beyond Imaginary-Symbolic) through formalization and/or the babble of la langue, he reasserts the dimension of Symbolic/imaginary, its fictions and lies, as unavoidable. That's why the focus on the Real in late Lacan is not his final word, and we should draw "a sharp distinction between the late Lacan and the final Lacan": the very last Lacan, in his twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars (*L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue, s'aile à mourre* [1976–1977] and *Le moment de conclure* [1977–1978]),

self-critically abandons much of what he pursued during the later period of his teaching from the 1960s through the mid-1970s ... starting in 1976, Lacan puts an end to the reign of the *matheme*, namely, the pursuit of an analysis purged of meaning through mathematical-style formalizations bearing upon a senseless Real ... the final Lacan opts instead for an anti-reductive treatment of sense avowedly inspired by Marxian materialism. The meanings of Imaginary-Symbolic reality arise from, but thereafter become relatively autonomous in relation to, a meaningless Real that itself in turn comes to be affected and perturbed by these same meanings.<sup>8</sup>

Johnston correctly describes the shift that occurs in the very last Lacan; what one should add is that one should not read too much into this ending: it is not a final triumph of Lacan's thought, but rather the admission of a deadlock. Not a positive result – the parallel with historical materialism (the “non-reductionist” relationship between the “infrastructure” of the Real and the “superstructure” of the Imaginary-Symbolic) is rather miserable. The task remains: how to think the cut in the Real that opens up the space for the rise of the Imaginary-Symbolic?

One should be very clear here: Lacan's final admission of failure is also the failure of his “anti-philosophical” stance; it is the result of his reluctance to think through the philosophical implications of his theory. Which is why we should fearlessly return to philosophy – concretely, to Hegel, since this same problem is also the key problem Hegel struggles with: why is the detour through illusions necessary? Should we explain it as a cynical playing of the Absolute with itself? Hegel effectively sometimes formulates things in a deceiving way, as if the absolute Idea plays a game with itself, externalizes itself and then overcomes this externalization – and, significantly, Hegel even uses the term “enjoyment” here, as in the very last sentence of his *Encyclopedia*: “The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind.”<sup>9</sup> We fall into perversion only if we accept that there is an Absolute which plays (self-)transgressive games to amuse itself. Consequently, this entire configuration has to

be rejected in toto – it relies on the cynical reading of *les non-dupes errent*: you have to play the game, to be duped by it even if you know it's not true. However, the formula *les non-dupes errent* says something different: if you are not duped you are wrong, not just pragmatically (we need illusions to sustain our desire) but effectively, with regard to truth itself. Just playing the game without taking it seriously is not the way out.

But what then *is* the way out? We have to accept that none of the three solutions works: (1) we should aim at the Real and try to leave behind illusions; (2) while knowing that illusions are just that, we should “make use” of them to sustain our desire and avoid the deadlock of depression; (3) we should accept the fact that all there is is an inconsistent texture of illusions, that the ultimate illusion is the very idea of some Real beyond illusions, and we should joyfully play with this texture of illusions. There is a fourth solution: the Real is not external, outside the Imaginary/Symbolic texture of fictions, it is the immanent impossibility of this texture – illusions circulate around an impossible Real which has no substantial status outside the texture of illusions. In other words, the Real is not a hard inaccessible core of reality around which symbolic/imaginary fictions float protecting us from the direct touch of the Real; the Real is a purely virtual (and in this sense fictitious) point of reference around which we construct different versions of reality. Once we fully endorse this notion of the Real, we no longer need the cynical recourse to the cobweb of illusions to sustain our desire: the tension that defines desire is already operative in the “pure” Real which is not a pure chaos outside the Symbolic but the immanent impossibility of the Symbolic. This is why Lacan's notion of the Borromean knot that inextricably links the three dimension of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary cannot be the ultimate answer to the question of how reality is structured: the Symbolic and the Imaginary are not parts of the ultimate ontological reality. The question to be addressed here is: how the pre-human Real in itself has to be structured so that the Symbolic and the Imaginary can arise in it.

And, again, Lacan gets caught in a deadlock not because he remained too much within philosophy but because he didn't go far enough in philosophical reflection: his notion of the Real remains



haunted by the naïve idea of the Real as a substantial Otherness which eludes symbolization. Lacan failed to draw all the consequences from the fact that the Real is absolutely inherent to the Symbolic, its immanent deadlock/impossibility.

This is why “Christian atheism” does not imply the cynical stance of “making use” of the religious fiction, of playing with god, although we know it is an illusion: this is not what Lacan means when he claims that theologians are the only true materialists. What he claims is that the Real (in the most materialist sense) can only be discerned in the cracks/inconsistencies of theological edifices since it is constituted by these cracks, since it only dwells in these cracks. There is no ironic or cynical playing here, no game of “we are really materialists, but we will play with religious fictions to prove our point.” When Lacan says *Dieu est inconscient*, this is the most anti-Jungian statement imaginable. It does not mean that divinity is the domain of our profound unconscious psychic archetypes; insofar as Lacan abbreviates “inconscient” as “ics,” which also evokes “*inconsistent*,” inconsistent, and insofar as logical inconsistency is for Lacan the defining feature of materiality, this means that the divine inconsistency is the only path to materialism – “gods are of the real,” and the Real is accessible only through the divine inconsistency. Any “direct” materialism falls into the trap of ontology.

And does the same not hold for Singularity? One can argue for the cynical reading of Singularity: in order not to get suffocated in its collective space of directly shared experiences, subjects will “make use” of the illusion of our ordinary interactivity as free individuals, and play the game of persisting in our ordinary reality as if it is the true one. What we stumble upon here is the same ambiguity as the one towards the end of *The Matrix*: in the last scene of the movie, Neo announces the liberation of humanity from the Matrix – but the status of this liberation is ambiguous. As the result of Neo’s intervention, there is a “SYSTEM FAILURE” in the Matrix; at the same time, Neo addresses people still caught in the Matrix as the Savior who will teach them how to liberate themselves from the constraints of the Matrix – they will be able to break the physical laws, bend metals, fly in the air ... However, the problem is that all these “miracles” are possible only if we remain WITHIN the Virtual



Reality sustained by the Matrix and merely bend or change its rules: our “real” status is still that of the slaves of the Matrix, we as it were are merely gaining additional power to change our mental prison rules. Why does Neo not propose exiting from the Matrix altogether and entering the ordinary reality in which we are miserable creatures living on the destroyed earth surface? Because, as he learned from Morpheus, this miserable reality is not the Real. The matrix is, of course, a metaphor for what Lacan called the “big Other,” the virtual symbolic order, the network that structures reality for us. This dimension of the “big Other” is that of the constitutive alienation of the subject in the symbolic order: the big Other pulls the strings, the subject doesn’t speak, he “is spoken” by the symbolic structure. The paradox, the “infinite judgement,” of *The Matrix* is the co-dependence of the two aspects: the total artificiality (the constructed nature) of reality, and the triumphant return of the body in the sense of the ballet-like quality of slow-motion fights and defiance of the laws of ordinary physical reality. Surprisingly, *The Matrix* is much more precise than one would expect with regard to the distinction between the Real and reality: Morpheus’s famous “Welcome to the desert of the real!” does not refer to the real world outside the Matrix, but to the purely formal digital universe of the Matrix itself. When Morpheus confronts Neo with the image of the ruins of Chicago, he simply says “This is the real world!”, i.e., what remained of our reality outside the Matrix after the catastrophe, while the “desert of the real” refers to the grayness of the purely formal digital universe which generates the false “wealth of experience” of humans caught in the Matrix.

So the solution is not destroying the big Other but Lacan’s counterpart to alienation, separation. In Lacan’s terms, does separation mean what Neo seems to preach at the end of the film, a “savoir faire,” making use of the Matrix instead of being alienated in it? Is this what Lacan himself means by separation? No: separation means primarily the separation of the big Other from itself, and our (subject’s) location in this gap that separates the Other from itself. As we have already seen apropos Christianity, it means that the gap that separates us from god is the gap that separates god from itself. Nobody – neither we nor god – can enjoy here the position of a

cynical manipulator; if anything, separation means that the entire constellation is thoroughly inconsistent and chaotic since there is no controlling agency that secretly pulls the strings.

Can the same operation be performed with regard to Singularity? Our starting point here should be the immanent inconsistency of Singularity itself? Why do we automatically imagine the passage into Singularity as our immersion in a vast singular field? Why should it not be not a conflicting and inconsistent domain of spaces? While it is, of course, too early to speculate about conflicting Singularities, we should at least entertain the possibility of inconsistent and conflicting levels of shared experiences which will transpose the conflict between individuals into the conflict between forms of direct collective experience. Maybe, this is how we can overcome our alienation in the Singularity with the separation: by way of opening ourselves up to the immanent inconsistencies and conflicts that traverse Singularity itself. Separation is thus again not the cynical game in which the subject, exempted from Singularity, selectively plays with its different parts. (Recall Musk's description of how I will be able to link or disconnect my brain from the space of shared experiences: in contrast with this description, we should emphasize that I will mostly not even be aware when I am immersed in Singularity.) Separation means that, while I am still exposed to the space of Singularity, I realize that Singularity is not a singular agent that controls the game but an inconsistent space traversed by inconsistencies, full of glitches.

Cantor revolutionized mathematics when he debunked the idealist myth of a single Infinity and introduced the materialist topic of multiple inconsistent infinities. (As a devout Catholic, he desperately tried to undo the damage he inflicted on the religious notion of the divine infinite One by way of imagining a non-quantitative infinite One which would encompass the multitude of numerical infinities.) Perhaps, we should do today a similar thing with Singularity; to debunk the notion of one Singularity as a new form of the divine and introduce multiple inconsistent and conflicting singularities. So instead of the grand design of Singularity, it is much more realist to consider the production of particular types of "posthumans" for

specific tasks – soldiers who can endure long strenuous battles are, as far as we can tell, already “produced.”

Let’s return for a moment to the already-mentioned prospect of a shared sexual experience: its perverted version would be not to do it with somebody far away (a close friend allows me to share her/his experience while s/he is making love), but to share the experience with my partner while we are doing it. To immediately experience the effects of my sexual activity onto my partner – would this not amount to a sexualized version of subject-object identity? This example confronts us with the topic of sharing experiences which can be in conflict one with another. Let’s imagine a much worse case: I am a sadist who is able to share the experience of the person I am torturing – will I be able to integrate this experience into my own and use it as an additional source of my perverted pleasure (“great, I can feel how my victim is suffering!”), or will the clash of two experiences lead to some kind of a breakdown? This type of overlapping of multiple experiences is similar to what quantum physics calls superposition (which is possible only in the virtual space of quantum oscillations): it cannot happen in our reality (in the same way that the infamous Schrödinger’s cat cannot be both alive and dead in our reality).

But what if Singularity will not be modeled upon a single self-awareness? What if it will be a fragmentary space open to a plurality of different, inconsistent, even “contradictory” experiences? Recall the adolescent’s ambiguous stance towards his father: what if Singularity will be able not only to contain side by side hate and love, but to register their conflict as such? Back to our example of a shared sexual experience with my partner, what if it will enable me to experience one’s pleasure and the other’s suffering in the same way that, in moments of intense enjoyment, I experience not only pleasure *and* pain but pleasure *in* my pain? If we are dealing with superposition of multiple experiences which cannot be totalized into an ecstatic One, this means that there is no single Singularity but an inconsistent texture of shared experiences which, for structural reasons, always have to be limited – if these limits are stretched too far, my shared experience explodes into a nightmare. This brings us again to the question of power: what regulatory mechanism will

decide which experiences I will share with others, and who will control this mechanism? Two things are sure: one should discard as utopian the idea that I myself will be able to connect/disconnect my brain, and one should fully accept the fact that a wide all-encompassing link between minds cannot take place at the level of subjective experience but only at an objective level, as a complex network of machines which “read” my mental states – a vast “synchronous” collective experience is a dangerous myth.

## 5

### The Fall that Makes Us Like God

Our conclusion is thus that Singularity cannot keep its theological promise to redeem us from the Fall: it may happen that in post-humanity we will move into another dimension in which we will no longer be “fallen,” constrained to our finitude, but this does not mean that we will be redeemed in the sense of reuniting ourselves with some dimension experienced as divine. This, however, also does not mean that the topic of theology has to be left behind – the notion of the Fall deserves a closer examination. We have already seen how the mature Platonov had to concede defeat at this point, and his notion of *toská* can be summarized as the awareness of the Fall in the biblical sense of hard work, bearing children ... in short, what Platonov calls laboring life – we all know the description from *Genesis* 3:

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord among the trees of the garden. But the Lord called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden,

and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

After cursing the serpent, god turns to the woman:

To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Enough has been written about the paradoxes contained in these lines, especially about the most obvious one: why did god submit Adam and Eve to what is effectively a forced choice? Here is Stephen Greenblatt’s version of this paradox which even mentions Musk:

Ancient commentators repeatedly asked why the God in the story, having commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, did not do more to prevent them from the disastrous act of disobedience. To be sure, the Creator warned them that death would follow any violation of his prohibition, but how could the first humans have possibly understood what it meant to die? Why was the tree rooted in the very midst of the garden and not locked away, the way we lock away poison (or nuclear waste)? And how, before they had acquired knowledge of good and evil, could humans in their Edenic innocence have ever grasped the moral significance of what they were doing? Adam

and Eve manifestly had insufficient knowledge of the long-term consequences of their actions, and God, who could have implanted this knowledge in them far more easily than Elon Musk's proposed chip, evidently chose not to do so.<sup>1</sup>

More important for our purpose is the paradox of knowing: the serpent tells Eve that after eating the apple from the forbidden tree, "you will be like God, knowing good and evil," and, as Hegel notices, the serpent doesn't lie – god immediately confirms it commenting that Adam and Eve are now "like one of us" (let's ignore here the mysterious plural of gods). So how can eating the apple which brings knowledge and divinity throw the first humans into the misery of mortal life and ignorance? The standard explanation is, of course, that, by way of imposing on them a hard choice, biased as it is, god is bestowing on the first humans their freedom, making them aware of their responsibility to choose between good and evil. Even the limitation of knowledge serves this purpose: if our knowledge is perfect, if all the details of the situation are clearly present in our mind, the choice is easy, but what makes a moral choice hard is precisely that we have to decide in a murky situation where the full burden of decision is upon us ... In the continuation of the quoted passage, Greenblatt provides a succinct version of this argument:

Virtually all the early interpreters agreed that the Creator did not want to compromise the essential nature of humans by taking away their freedom to choose, even though that freedom was the source of so much trouble and misery. If Adam and Eve knew everything that would follow from their actions – if they could make the inconceivably vast calculations that would give them, in Shakespeare's words, "the future in the instant" – they might have avoided their catastrophic blunder, but it would, the Genesis story suggests, have been at the cost of their humanity ... This is not a celebration of ignorance or fecklessness. There was, after all, an explicit warning, however difficult it might have been for the first humans to interpret it correctly, and the consequences of the fateful choice were manifestly terrible. But the Bible represents humans neither as automata – the slaves of God – nor as

miraculous sages, endowed with all the knowledge they need to make the inevitably correct decisions.<sup>2</sup>

However, the central enigma remains: in what precise way morality (knowing the difference between good and evil and acting upon it) implies ignorance (or, at least, a radical limitation of our knowledge)? The philosopher who confronted this issue and provided the only consequent answer was Kant. When Kant says that he reduced the domain of knowledge in order to make space for religious faith, he is to be taken quite literally, in a radically anti-Spinozist way: from the Kantian perspective, Spinoza's position appears as a nightmarish vision of subjects reduced to marionettes. What, exactly, does a marionette stand for as a subjective stance? In Kant, we find the term "marionette" in a mysterious subchapter of his *Critique of Practical Reason* entitled "Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to His Practical Vocation," in which he endeavors to answer the question of what would happen to us if we were to gain access to the noumenal domain, to the *Ding an sich*:

Instead of the conflict which now the moral disposition has to wage with inclinations and in which, after some defeats, moral strength of mind may be gradually won, God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes ... Thus most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, few would be done from hope, none from duty. The moral worth of actions, on which alone the worth of the person and even of the world depends in the eyes of supreme wisdom, would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.<sup>3</sup>

So, for Kant, direct access to the noumenal domain would deprive us of the very "spontaneity" which forms the kernel of transcendental freedom: it would turn us into lifeless automata, or, to put it in today's terms, into "thinking machines." And is this not ultimately presented as achievable in the prospect of Singularity? The prospect of neuralink is not to be dismissed as yet another "ontic" scientific



research project of no authentic philosophical interest, since it offers something effectively new and unheard of which challenges our status of being-human: the prospect of actual (empirical) overcoming of our finitude/sexuality/embeddedness-in-the-symbolic. Entering this other dimension of Singularity becomes a simple positive fact, not a matter of sublime inner experience. What does this mean, for the status of our subjectivity and for our self-experience? Can we imagine a form of self-awareness that would be at the level of self-less floating in the space of Singularity? Insofar as I as a singular Self no longer exist in Singularity, one possibility is to draw a parallel between the fate of the Self in Singularity and the Buddhist enlightenment in which the Self directly experientially assumes his own non-being. Such an enlightened awareness is no longer self-awareness: it is no longer I who experience myself as the agent of my thoughts, “my” awareness is the direct awareness of a self-less system, a self-less knowledge. However, there is a difference between the Buddhist enlightenment and Singularity: in Singularity, I do not acquire a distance towards my feelings and other experiences, I don’t identify with the Void that is the truth of appearances; I, on the contrary, fully immerse myself in the shared space of feelings and other experiences.

There is a more fundamental concern with regard to the question of the fate of subjectivity in Singularity. The innermost core of subjectivity resides in a unique act of what Fichte baptized “self-positing”: each subject is a point of absolute autonomy, which means that it cannot be reduced to a moment in the network of causes and effects – in an act of self-relating that Hegel described as “absolute recoil,” it has to “posit” retroactively the very causes of its existence. This closed self-referential circle of the absolute recoil in which the cause is a retroactive effect of its effects is thus effectively a kind of realization of the famous joke, already mentioned in Chapter 1, about bootstrapping from the story of Baron Münchhausen who pulled himself and the horse on which he was sitting out of a swamp in which he was drowning by pulling himself up by his own hair. In natural reality, such bootstrapping is, of course, impossible, a nonsensical paradox passable only as a joke; however, it not only can happen in the domain of spirit, it is even *the* feature which

defines spirit. The material base of this loop of self-positing remains, of course: “there is no spirit without matter,” if we destroy the body, spirit vanishes. However, the self-positing of spirit is not just some kind of “user’s illusion”; it has an actuality of its own, with actual effects.

It is in this sense that Lacan claims that, at the conclusion of the analytic treatment, the subject is ready to conceive itself as *causa sui*, its own cause: the cause of a subject is, of course, not an object in reality but *objet a*, the object-cause of desire which has no substantial reality – it is a purely virtual X which merely gives body to the void of desire. In our everyday life of desire, we fetishize/reify *objet a*, i.e., we treat it as a real pre-existing cause of our desire; at the end of the treatment, the subject realizes that its cause is its own (presup)position, retroactively posited by the subject itself as its effect – the paradox of absolute recoil is actualized here, the circle is closed, the effect posits its own cause. For a partisan of the so-called “materialist theory of subjectivity” (which insists on subject as the effect of a pre-subjective material process, a process that cannot be reduced to the subject’s self-mediation), this closure of the circle is the basic idealist illusion of self-causation, the illusion that obfuscates the decentered process out of which a subject emerges. However, from a strict Lacanian-Hegelian standpoint, this self-causation is not just a speculative/idealist illusion; it designates a cut, an interruption, in the real itself. The subject’s self-positing is “idealist” only if we define reality as a complete texture of causes and effects, without any gaps or cuts. This is why Nietzsche was doubly wrong in his dismissive reference to Münchhausen in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

The desire for “freedom of will,” ... the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one’s actions oneself ... involves nothing less than ... to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the *slough* of *nothingness* (aus dem Sumpf des Nichts).<sup>4</sup>

What Nietzsche rejects here is the self-positing which in German Idealism defines the subject, and it is our claim that one can interpret this act of self-positing also in a materialist way, although the consequences of this act are often quite paradoxical. Let’s take a

recent example: it was reported in the media that Raphael Samuel, a citizen of India, said he would sue his parents for giving birth to him. In a wonderful display of what Anders calls Promethean shame, the shame at being born, thrown into the world, and not self-manufactured, Samuel is telling people, especially Indian kids, that they don't owe their parents anything; he also claims that putting a child through institutions like school and the job market without their consent is wrong ...<sup>5</sup> We should not reject Samuel's complaint as ridiculous – there is a deep insight in it, we just have to avoid the confusion between the empirical and the transcendental level. Empirically, I am of course “thrown into the world,” I don't choose my body, the culture in which I am educated as a child, etc. However, to become a Self, there has to be a transcendental act of self-positing, i.e., I have to assume my subjectivity in a minimally active way, and the question is: can this “absolute” act survive the immersion in Singularity? I recently read a report on transgender individuals in a Slovene daily newspaper, whose title reproduces exactly the same paradox: “Finally I live in a body into which I wanted to be born” – as if, prior to my birth, I already had chosen my gender identity, and biological fate didn't respect my choice ...

This notion of unconscious reflexivity also resolves the problem of the endless regress in grounding a normative order (which rules do we obey to ground our obeying rules?) or self-consciousness (when I am conscious of my consciousness, am I also conscious of my being conscious of my consciousness etc. ad infinitum). The solution is not the Fichtean one (in the absolute I, positing and being-positing coincide, I posit myself as positing), although it is strictly homologous to it. The solution is that this act of self-positing, the act through which, as Lacan put it, the subject acts as its own cause, is unconscious, always-already presupposed by the conscious ego. Hegel called this circle of self-positing “absolute recoil”: the effects of a cause retroactively produce their own cause. What characterizes this “materialist” self-positing is that, in contrast to the Fichtean “idealist” self-positing, it has the structure of a failure which can best be illustrated by the loop of symbolic representation: a subject endeavors to adequately represent itself, this representation fails, and the subject *is* the result of this failure. Recall the already-

mentioned “Hugh-Grant-paradox”: the hero tries to articulate his love to the beloved, he gets caught in stumbling and confused repetitions, and it is this very failure to deliver his message of love in a perfect way that bears witness to its authenticity ... Subject is thus not just caught in the reflexivity of absolute recoil, it *is nothing but* this reflexivity.

The notion of such an act of unconscious self-positing is not just an abstract rumination – it can help us to resolve a tension in the dominant form of LGBT+ ideology. Many observers have noticed a tension in LGBT+ ideology between social constructivism and (some kind of biological) determinism: if an individual biologically identified/perceived as man experiences himself in his psychic economy a man, it is considered a social construct; but if an individual biologically identified/perceived as man experiences herself as woman, this is read as an urge, not a simple arbitrary construct but a deeper non-negotiable identity, which must be met by sex-changing surgery if the individual demands it. Media in Slovenia reported that in a high school in Ljubljana, a “progressive” teacher organized a trip to take pupils to a big swimming pool and asked them there to cross-dress (boys wearing bras, etc.). The obvious point of this experiment was to demonstrate to the children how gender identity is not a biological fact but a construct of social customs – however, I find it difficult to imagine a more ruthless and stupid experiment! Imagine among the pupils a (biological) boy who identifies psychically as a girl: I doubt s/he would feel relief at the fact that he can for a moment dress the way he feels appropriate to his true identity. Would the experiment not rather remind him of the fact that this identity is *not* simply the result of how he dresses etc. – a traumatic cross-dressing (a “girl” obliged to dress as a boy) is his/her daily life!

Along the same lines, kindergartens in Norway were told that, if a small boy is seen playing with girls, this orientation should be supported, he should be stimulated to play with dolls, etc., so that his eventual feminine psychic identity can articulate itself. The solution is here rather simple: yes, psychic sexual identity is a choice, not a biological fact, but it is not a conscious choice that the subject can playfully repeat and transform. It is an unconscious choice which

precedes subjective constitution and which is, as such, formative of subjectivity, which means that the change of this choice entails the radical transformation of the bearer of the choice. In short, this choice is a case of the unconscious act of self-positing.

“Fall” is the theological name for such an unconscious choice, and “Fall” designates the wound (of separation, of the constitutive loss) which characterizes our being-human as finite and sexed. Musk (and other proponents of neuralink) wants to heal the wound literally: to fill in the gap, to have man united with God by way of making him god-like, i.e., by way of providing him with properties and capacities which we (until now) experienced as “divine.” What makes this option properly traumatic is that it turns around the gap that separates our ordinary daily experience from sublime speculations about our proximity to god. When someone talks about experiencing a unity with god, a realist tells him to calm down: “Don’t get lost in your dreams, remember that you are still rooted in this miserable earthly reality!” But with the prospect of Singularity, the reply to this “realist” view is easy: “We are the true realists, we can provide divine immortality in our empirical reality, and it is you who still believes that our material mortality is the ultimate horizon of our being that I effectively dreaming – you cling to the old notion of reality, ignoring the big breakthrough!”

Our wager is that here, at this point where Fichte and Hegel seem totally out of date and out of touch with our contemporaneity, we have to return to the two of them, more precisely: to Hegel’s reading of the Fall, if we want to move beyond mere fascination at the prospect of Singularity and really think what is going on here. As we have already seen, (some) proponents of Singularity read it in a Hegelian way, as the final reconciliation between Mind and Reality, as the healing of the wound of the Fall. However, such a reading is totally incompatible with Hegel’s interpretation of the Fall. According to the standard reading of Paul, god gave Law to men in order to make them conscious of their sin, even to make them sin all the more, and thus make them aware of their need for salvation which can occur only through divine grace – however, does this reading not involve a strange perverse notion of god? The only way to avoid such a perverse reading is to insist on the absolute identity of the

two gestures: god does not *first* push us into Sin in order to create the need for Salvation, and *then* offer himself as the redeemer from the trouble into which he got us in the first place; it is not that the Fall is followed by redemption: the Fall is identical to redemption, it is “in itself” already redemption. That is to say, what *is* “redemption”? The explosion of freedom, the breaking out of the natural enchainment – and this, precisely, is what happens in the Fall. One should bear in mind here the central tension of the Christian notion of the Fall: the Fall (“regression” to the natural state, enslavement to passions) is *stricto sensu* identical with the dimension *from which* we fall, i.e. it is the very movement of the Fall that creates, opens up, what is lost in it.

We all know Wagner’s motif *Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur der Sie schlug* from the finale of his Parsifal. Hegel says the same thing, although with the accent shifted in the opposite direction: the Spirit is itself the wound it tries to heal, i.e., the wound is self-inflicted. That is to say, what is “Spirit” at its most elementary? The “wound” of nature: subject is the immense – absolute – power of negativity, of introducing a gap/cut into the given-immediate substantial unity, the power of differentiating, of “abstracting,” of tearing apart and treating as self-standing what in reality is part of an organic unity. This is why the notion of the “self-alienation” of Spirit (of Spirit losing itself in its otherness, in its objectivization, in its result) is more paradoxical than it may appear: it should be read together with Hegel’s assertion of the thoroughly non-substantial character of Spirit: there is no *res cogitans*, no thing which (as its property) also thinks, spirit is nothing but the process of overcoming natural immediacy, of the cultivation of this immediacy, of withdrawing-into-itself or “taking off” from it, of – why not – alienating itself from it. The paradox is thus that there is no Self that precedes the Spirit’s “self-alienation”: the very process of alienation creates/generates the “Self” from which Spirit is alienated and to which it then returns. (Hegel here turns around the standard notion that a failed version of X presupposes this X as their norm (measure): X is created, its space is outlined, only through repetitive failures to reach it.) Spirit’s self-alienation is the same as, fully coincides with, its alienation from its Other (nature), because it

constitutes itself through its “return-to-itself” from its immersion in natural Otherness. In other words, Spirit’s return-to-itself creates the very dimension to which it returns. (This holds for all “returns to origins”: when, from nineteenth century onwards, new nation-states were constituting themselves in Central and Eastern Europe, their discovery and return to “old ethnic roots” generated these roots.) What this means is that the “negation of negation,” the “return-to-onself” from alienation, does not occur where it seems to: in the “negation of negation,” Spirit’s negativity is not relativized, subsumed under an encompassing positivity; it is, on the contrary, the “simple negation” which remains attached to the presupposed positivity it negated, the presupposed Otherness from which it alienates itself, and the “negation of negation” is nothing but the negation of the substantial character of this Otherness itself, the full acceptance of the abyss of Spirit’s self-relating which retroactively posits all its presuppositions. In other words, once we are in negativity, we never quit it and regain the lost innocence of Origins; it is, on the contrary, only in “negation of negation” that the Origins are truly lost, that their very loss is lost, that they are deprived of the substantial status of that which was lost. The Spirit heals its wound not by directly healing it, but by getting rid of the very full and sane Body into which the wound was cut. It is in this precise sense that, according to Hegel, “the wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind”:<sup>6</sup> Hegel’s point is not that the Spirit heals its wounds so perfectly that, in a magic gesture of retroactive sublation, even their scars disappear; the point is rather that, in the course of a dialectical process, a shift of perspective occurs which makes the wound itself appear as its opposite – the wound itself is its own healing when perceived from another standpoint. At its sharpest, this coincidence of the opposites appears apropos self-consciousness, i.e., subject as thinking:

Abstractly, being evil means singularizing myself in a way that cuts me off from the universal (which is the rational, the laws, the determinations of spirit). But along with this separation there arises being-for-itself and for the first time the universally spiritual, laws – what ought to be. So it is not the case that rational consideration has an external relationship to evil: it is itself what is evil.<sup>7</sup>

And this brings us to *Genesis*: does the story of the Fall not say exactly the same thing? The serpent promises Adam and Eve that, by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, *they* will become like god; and after the two do it, god says: “Behold, Adam has become like one of us.”(*Genesis* 3:22) Hegel’s comment is: “So the serpent did not lie, for God confirms what it said.” Then he goes on to reject the claim that what god says is meant with irony: “Cognition is the principle of spirituality, and this ... is also the principle by which the injury of the separation is healed. It is in this principle of cognition that the principle of ‘divinity’ is also posited.”<sup>8</sup> It is crucial to follow here Hegel’s entire line of argumentation and, not to miss the audacity of his point, to read this passage together with the one in which he asserts that subjective knowledge is not just the possibility to choose evil or good, “it is the consideration or the cognition that makes people evil, so that consideration and cognition themselves are what is evil, and that therefore such cognition is what ought not to exist because it is the source of evil.”<sup>9</sup> In short, what makes us divine is our very fall (into Evil) since thinking is both at the same time, evil and reconciliation. Hegel is clear here: thinking not only opens up the choice between Good and Evil, thinking as such is evil since the reflexivity that it implies makes it operate at a distance from immediate substantial unity – when we think, we abstract, we tear up the unity of the object of thought. Simultaneously, this reflexive distance implied in thinking implies freedom (in our thoughts we are free – formally, at least).

This is how one should understand Hegel’s dictum from his *Phenomenology* that Evil is the gaze itself which perceives Evil everywhere around it: the gaze which sees Evil excludes itself from the social Whole it criticizes, and this exclusion is the formal characteristics of Evil. And Hegel’s point is that the Good emerges as a possibility and duty only through this primordial/constitutive choice of Evil: we experience the Good when, after choosing Evil, we become aware of the utter inadequacy of our situation.

Pathbreaking as it is, one should say that Hegel’s reading of *Genesis* is too short at two (connected) topics, and the reason is not that Hegel was too much a prisoner of his time to see the dimension he misses – much more paradoxically, in both cases, Hegel is here



not Hegelian enough, he fails to make here a properly Hegelian twist. First, when he characterizes an evil person, Hegel reduces evil to the moment of particularity in its opposition to universality (natural egotism, selfish behavior ...). This is why, as Hegel points out, every consistent figure of Evil has to display some features of Goodness. As one would expect, Hegel mentions the Devil in Milton's *Paradise Lost* who is obviously a figure of great personal power, pursuing a project that he experiences as profoundly ethical ... But was not at this point Schelling (in his *On the Essence of Human Freedom*) much more profound when he decoded in Evil a principled ("non-pathological" in Kant's sense) stance which is as such radically spiritual? True Evil has nothing to do with particular egotism and selfish interests but is a positive spiritual project for which people are ready even to sacrifice their lives (as the Nazis did in order to exterminate the Jews or dedicated Stalinist Communists did in order to crush the Trotskyist or kulak resistance). If Hegel were to be fully consistent with the core of his own thought, he should even say that Good itself is nothing but universalized Evil, an Evil which wins over others and acquires the position of universality. Therein resides also Hegel's critique of abstract universality: for him, the French revolutionaries were evil in their Terror precisely because they were thoroughly principled and ruthlessly pursued a universality which ultimately excluded all particular content. So when particular content is not reconciled with universality, the guilt is even more on the side of "abstract" universality.

For most of us it is difficult to fully admit even the possibility of a radical ethical deficiency, i.e., to accept that there are really evil people. Greta Thunberg said to the world leaders gathered at the UN general assembly in September 2019: "But no matter how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that, because if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil, and that I refuse to believe."<sup>10</sup> Maybe, she should stop refusing to believe and simply accept that they *are* evil.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, the moment arrives when one should abandon the belief that our opponents, misdirected as they are, remain fully human pursuing the same goals as we all do – what if we are dealing with real enemies, with enemies who are genuinely evil?

This brings us to the second of Hegel's limitations which is even more important for our concern. When Hegel characterizes Evil as *Entzweiung*, separation, self-division of the Absolute, he quietly ignores (in his reading of the Fall) the key fact that, when the Absolute is opposed to the "fallen" particularity, the true guilt and responsibility are on the side of the Absolute itself. Back to the story of the Fall: what Hegel should have said (since it follows clearly from the inner logic of his thought) is that in all this affair the truly evil character is god himself who pushes the first humans into the Fall, and what makes things even worse is that, instead of doing it openly, he as it were washes his hands and presents the Fall as the consequence of a "free" human decision ... This is why Christianity culminates in crucifixion, a scene in which the *Entzweiung* (which for Hegel formally defines Evil) is directly and explicitly transposed from the split between god and humans into god himself who (with the terrifying utterance of "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me") is split from himself? The category to be used apropos this displacement of the gap that separates us from god to a gap that separates god from himself is disparity, a term which occurs three times in a key passage from the Foreword to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he provides the most concise explanation of what it means to conceive Substance also as Subject:

The disparity which exists in consciousness between the "I" and the substance which is its object is the distinction between them, the negative in general. This can be regarded as the defect of both, though it is their soul, or that which moves them. That is why some of the ancients conceived the void as the principle of motion, for they rightly saw the moving principle as the negative, though they did not as yet grasp that the negative is the self. Now, although this negative appears at first as a disparity between the "I" and its object, it is just as much the disparity of the substance with itself. Thus what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject.<sup>12</sup>

Crucial is the final reversal: the disparity between subject and substance is simultaneously the disparity of the substance with itself

– or, to put it in Lacan’s terms, disparity means that the lack of the subject is simultaneously the lack in the Other: subjectivity emerges when substance cannot achieve full identity with itself, when substance is in itself “barred,” traversed by an immanent impossibility or antagonism. In short, the subject’s epistemological ignorance, its failure to fully grasp the opposed substantial content, simultaneously indicates a limitation/failure/lack of the substantial content itself. Therein also resides the key dimension of the theological revolution of Christianity: the alienation of man from god has to be projected/transferred back into god itself, as the alienation of god from itself (therein resides the speculative content of the notion of divine *kenosis*) – this is the Christian version of Hegel’s insight into how the disparity of subject and substance implies the disparity of substance with regard to itself. This is why the unity of man and god is enacted in Christianity in a way that fundamentally differs from the way of pagan religions where man has to strive to overcome his fall from god through the effort to purify his being from material filth and elevate himself to rejoin god. In Christianity, on the contrary, god in a way *repeats Adam and Eve’s fall on himself*: he falls from himself, he becomes a finite mortal human abandoned by god (in the figure of Christ and his lament on the cross “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), and man can only achieve unity with god by identifying with this god, god abandoned by itself.

Again, in his reading of *Genesis*, Hegel ignores this aspect: he only talks about the separation of man from god, and fails to mention that the reconciliation of god and man is also (primarily even) the reconciliation of god *with himself* – it is only through the reconciliation with humans that god truly becomes god (in the true concrete universality of this notion), so reconciliation between god and humanity is a key event in and for god himself ... However, Hegel’s main insight remains fully valid and pertinent: for Hegel, we, humans, reach immortality and infinity not by way of undoing the Fall, by way of somehow getting rid of the obstacle of our finite bodily existence and moving to another dimension of some higher reality, but by way of reconciling ourselves with (what appeared as) the obstacle and accepting that this “obstacle” plays the positive role of sustaining the space of what it appears as the obstacle to.

Reconciliation is not overcoming the obstacle, but asserting it in its positive role.

At the level of political and social change, this means we should abandon any extrapolation of a nonalienated future from present tendencies – such a mode of thinking (the logic of “now we are in a critical moment of utter alienation, and the possibility is open for us to act as agents of overcoming alienation”) is utterly foreign to Hegel who repeatedly emphasizes the retroactive nature of overcoming alienation: we overcome alienation through realizing that we’ve already overcome it. In other words, nothing “really changes” in overcoming alienation, we just shift our perspective and gain the insight into how what appears as alienation is the immanent condition of dis-alienation, is in itself already dis-alienation. It is in this sense that, in his “small” (Encyclopedia) *Logic*, Hegel proposes his own version of *la vérité surgit de la méprise*, ambiguously asserting that “only from this error does the truth come forth”:

In the sphere of the finite we can neither experience nor see that the purpose is genuinely attained. The accomplishing of the infinite purpose consists therefore only in sublating the illusion that it has not yet been accomplished. The good, the absolute good, fulfills itself eternally in the world, and the result is that it is already fulfilled in and for itself, and does not need to wait upon us for this to happen. This is the illusion in which we live, and at the same time it is this illusion alone that is the activating element upon which our interest in the world rests. It is within its own process that the Idea produces that illusion for itself; it posits an other confronting itself, and its action consists in sublating that illusion. Only from this error does the truth come forth, and herein lies our reconciliation with error and with finitude. Otherness or error, as sublated, is itself a necessary moment of the truth, which can only be in that it makes itself into its own result.<sup>[13](#)</sup>

In short, the ultimate deception is not to see that one already has what one is looking for, like Christ’s disciples who were awaiting his “real” reincarnation, blind to the fact that their collective already was the Holy Spirit, the return of the living Christ. To understand this process of necessary illusion, we have to take a closer look at the

structure of temporality that is implied here. Let's take a (perhaps) surprising example from the operatic universe. Towards the end of the Act 1 of Donizetti's masterpiece *L'elisir d'amore*, there is a passage which exemplifies in a musical way the basic thrust of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* ("sublation," or retroactive re-positioning). It is basically a trio sustained by a chorus; the love triangle is composed of Adina, a beautiful and wealthy farm owner, Nemorino, a simpleton who deeply loves her, and Belcore, an arrogant and boasting sergeant who also wants to marry Adina. Upon hearing the news that Adina is ready to marry Belcore the same evening, Nemorino entreats her to postpone marriage, and Belcore brutally tells him to fuck off: "Thank heaven dolt, that you are mad / or drunk with wine. / I would have choked you, reduced to shreds / if at this moment you were yourself. / So that I can keep my hands under control / go away, fool, hide from me." The magic, of course, resides in how this simple exchange is put into music: the most impressionable phrase – "*va via, buffone, ti ascondi a me*" (to be translated as "casse toi, pauvre con" or "fuck off, jerk") is first sung in an aggressive mode, but is later repositioned as the background of the predominant love duet. Consequently, at the end of this trio, peace and reconciliation are already achieved, although none of the participants knows it. What interests us here is this strange intermediate time when (as the form suggests) things are already decided, although the participants are still engaged in their struggles ... Are these not moments of pure bliss, not in the sense that there is no conflict but in the sense that the conflict which goes on is already going on within the space of reconciliation?

We also encounter such an intermediate time in epochs of political turmoil. When, in Venezuela, Guaidó proclaimed himself the only legitimate president with vast international support, and when his act triggered a renewed wave of public protests in his support, he declared on February 7 2019: "They (the Maduro regime) are already defeated. Today, our only enemy is despair. Today, our only enemy is doubt. Today, our only enemy is fear." However, although Guaidó presents the situation as already decided, things are more complex and the situation is more uncertain: Maduro was often already dismissed as "already dead," but so far has been able to

weather every crisis. The only way to correctly describe the situation is thus: *if*, at the end of the day, Guaidó wins and Maduro's regime collapses, *then* we will (retroactively) be able to say that the game was over long before. Once the collapse (contingently) happens, we can state that it already happened and that it was necessary for it to happen. The intermediate period thus extends between the two cuts: things are gradually changing in reality; the existing regime is undermined, because we act under the premise that, essentially, it is already lost, that its time is over. At a certain point, this premise is then fully asserted in reality and the existing order effectively collapses. The logic of "things change because they have already changed and lost their substantial truth" thus has to be supplemented by its apparent opposite: things gradually change at the material level, and this change is subterranean, like a secret spreading of a deadly infection; when the struggle erupts into the open, the mole has already finished its work and the battle is *de facto* over. Here is Hegel's classic description of this process apropos the struggle of Enlightenment against traditional religious spirit: the gradual extension of the pure insight of Enlightenment is

comparable to a silent extension or the expansion, say, of a scent in the unresisting atmosphere. It is a penetrating infection, which did not previously make itself noticeable as something distinct from and opposed to the indifferent medium into which it insinuates its way, and hence cannot be averted. Only when the infection has become widespread is that consciousness alive to it, which unconcernedly yielded to its influence ... In the condition, therefore, in which consciousness becomes aware of pure insight, this insight is already widespread. The struggle with it betrays the fact that the infection has done its work. The struggle is too late; and every means taken merely makes the disease worse; for the disease has seized the very marrow of spiritual life ... being now an invisible and unperceived spirit, it insinuates its way through and through the noble parts, and soon has got complete hold over all the vitals and members of the unconscious idol; and then "some fine morning it gives its comrade a shove with the elbow, when, bash! crash! – and the idol is lying on the floor".<sup>14</sup>

We all know the classic cartoon scene:<sup>15</sup> the cat reaches a precipice, but goes on walking, ignoring the fact that there is no ground under its feet; it starts to fall only when it looks down and notices the abyss. When it loses its authority, the regime is like a cat above the precipice: in order to fall, it only has to be reminded to look down ... But the opposite also holds: when an authoritarian regime approaches its final crisis, its dissolution as a rule follows two steps. Before its actual collapse, a mysterious rupture takes place: all of a sudden people know that the game is over, they are simply no longer afraid. It is not only that the regime loses its legitimacy, its exercise of power itself is perceived as an impotent panic reaction. In *Shah of Shahs*, a classic account of the Khomeini revolution, Ryszard Kapuscinski located the precise moment of this rupture: at a Tehran crossroad, a single demonstrator refused to budge when a policeman shouted at him to move, and the embarrassed policeman simply withdrew; in a couple of hours, all Tehran knew about this incident, and although there were street fights going on for weeks, everyone somehow knew the game was over.<sup>16</sup>

(Falling in) love is characterized by the same temporal gap. In one of Henry James's stories, the hero says about a woman close to him: "She already loves him, she just doesn't know it yet." What we find here is a kind of Freudian counterpart to Benjamin Libet's famous experiment about free will: even before we consciously decide (say, to move a finger), the appropriate neuronal processes are already underway – which means that our conscious decision just takes note of what is already going on (adding its superfluous authorization to a *fait accompli*). With Freud, decision is also prior to consciousness – however, it is not a purely objective process but an unconscious decision. Freud here rejoins Schelling for whom also a truly free decision is unconscious, which is why we never fall in love in the present (time): after a (usually long) process of subterranean gestation, we all of a sudden become aware that we (already) are in love. The Fall (into love) never happens – at a certain moment, it has always-already happened.

To put it in yet another way, freedom does not reside in your ability to resist when you suffer – that kind of resistance comes by nature. Freedom is to begin to enjoy when you suffer. In June 2019, Greater



Manchester police arrested a 93-year-old Josie Birds although she had committed no crime because it was her “dying wish.” Her health was failing and she wanted to be arrested for something before it was too late, and taken to a police station so she could experience what it was like to be on the wrong side of the law.<sup>17</sup> This request was an act of freedom if there ever was one.

And it is at this level that we can formulate the difference between Sartre and Lacan. For Sartre, the basic free act by means of which a subject “chooses itself,” formulates the existential project that defines its identity, is an act of self-consciousness. For Sartre, the Unconscious is a substantial, reified entity, something that objectively determines me. For Lacan, on the contrary, the primordial choice is unconscious since the Unconscious is not a substantial determination of the subject but the most basic level of reflexivity. In Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, the only figure of truth is the Joker, Batman’s opponent and its supreme villain. The goal of his terrorist attacks on Gotham City is made clear: they will stop when Batman takes off his mask and reveals his true identity. What, then, is the Joker who wants to disclose the truth beneath the mask, convinced that this disclosure will destroy the social order? He is not a man without mask, but, on the contrary, a man fully identified with his mask, a man who *is* his mask – there is nothing, no “ordinary guy,” beneath his mask. This is why the Joker has no backstory and lacks any clear motivation: he tells different people different stories about his scars, mocking the idea that he should have some deep-rooted trauma that drives him. This is why I find Todd Phillips’s *Joker* (2019) problematic: it aims precisely at providing a kind of socio-psychological genesis of the Joker, depicting the traumatic events which made him the figure he is. The problem is that thousands of young boys who grew up in ruined families and were bullied by their peers suffered the same fate, but only one “synthesized” these circumstances into the unique figure of the Joker.<sup>18</sup> In other words, yes, the Joker is the result of a set of pathogenic circumstances, but these circumstances can be described as the causes of this unique figure only retroactively, once the Joker is already-here. In one of the early novels about Hannibal Lecter, the claim that his monstrosity is the result of unfortunate circumstances is rejected: “Nothing



happened *to* him. *He* happened.” And, again, the difference between Sartre and Lacan is that Sartre reads this primordial choice of one’s existence as the supreme act of self-consciousness, while for Lacan, it is an act of the Unconscious par excellence.

This unconscious reflexivity should be explored in more detail since it is our hypothesis that it designates the very structure that may elude the grasp of Singularity. We are thus back at the basic philosophical question: is there a dimension of being-human which in principle eludes Singularity, even if we are fully immersed in it? What could this dimension be if we accept that our self-awareness is transparent to Singularity? For a Freudian, the solution is to change the focus from consciousness or awareness to the Unconscious.

## 6

### Reflexivity of the Unconscious

What happens with our Unconscious in the case of our immersion in Singularity? In order to approach this question properly, one should first clarify the notion of the Unconscious. As Lacan clearly saw, the Freudian Unconscious is not the substantial domain of Jungian archetypes as the ultimate psychic reality of the subject's being. It belongs neither to the order of being, nor to the order of non-being but to the virtual space of pure potentiality which is actualized, which acquires (social) reality, in the phenomenon of transference in the psychoanalytic treatment. Transference in which the Unconscious is actualized is not the analysand's projection onto his actual relationship with the analyst of the "deeper" reality of his traumatic fixations (I treat the analyst as if he is my father, etc.), it is not the illusory staging of a scene whose proper place is elsewhere, in the repressed memories from his past; it is the reality in which the Unconscious whose status is purely virtual gets actualized – let me quote here *in extenso* Gabriel Tupinamba's precise description of the paradoxical status of the Unconscious:

Lacan famously condensed Freud's definition of transference into the affirmation that it is "the actualization [*mise en acte*] of the reality of the unconscious" – this statement, however, cannot be properly understood without another remark, which further qualifies the "potency" that is actualized in the clinical setting: "the unconscious is neither being nor non-being, but something of the un-realized [*non-réalisé*]" . That is to say, yes, transference is the "rendering actual and manifest the patient's hidden and forgotten love impulses", as Freud puts it, but Lacan also adds that this artificial reality is not the precarious substitute of a more consistent, albeit hidden reality, some deep psychological typification of our satisfaction. Instead, the actualization of the

unconscious is rather substituting something which never had any full consistent reality to begin with: something which exists in the clinic, under its artificial conditions, but which cannot be generalized out of that space, as if it had an independent being. It would be wrong to say the unconscious has no being – for its being is actualized in transference – and it would be wrong to claim it has being – for it cannot be directly ontologized, transposed out of certain limits. Another way to approach Lacan's remark would be to claim that the ontological status of the unconscious-form is not that of another being – something which is taking place at a remove from the clinical setting – it is rather of an other to being, something which functions as a “negative supplement” of what is said: speech within the clinical setting reveals some inherent invariances, a kind of virtual supplement, which, albeit legible within those artificial constraints, does not attest to an underlying causal determination, independent from the space in which it actualizes itself ...

Rather than present it as the cause of those formations in which my speech exceeds what I mean to say, the unconscious is “constituted by the effects of speech on the subject”, by what the contingent associations made within the artificial confines of free association. It is precisely because the unconscious formations are first and foremost effects without independent causes that Lacan defines the status of the unconscious as “unreal”: not the unreality of its effects – its manifestations are after all insistently legible – but the unreality of the cause of these effects, whose absence in the clinical setting should not be mistaken for an external causal principle.<sup>1</sup>

Our question is here again: can neuralink capture *this* mode of the Unconscious, not the Unconscious as the substantial base of subject's being but the Unconscious as the virtual point of reference that exists (or, rather, insists) only as the absent point of reference of its effects, the Unconscious as the cause which doesn't precede its effects but is only actualized in its effects and thus retroactively caused by them? The unconscious is thus neither the original reality of, say, my traumatic relationship with my father, nor the present

reality of my relationship with the analyst but a third purely virtual entity in the space between two actual entities that are part of my reality. I experienced something similar when I consumed the two versions of Doctorow's *Billy Bathgate*, the original book and the cinema version. The movie is basically a failure, but an interesting one: a failure which nonetheless evokes in the viewer the specter of a much better novel. However, when one then goes on to read the novel on which the film is based, one is disappointed – this is *not* the novel the film evoked as the standard with regard to which it failed. The repetition (of a failed novel in the failed film) thus gives rise to a third, purely virtual, element: the better novel. This is an exemplary case of what Deleuze describes in a crucial passage from *Difference and Repetition*:

while it may seem that the two presents are successive, at a variable distance apart in the series of reals, in fact they form, rather, *two real series which coexist in relation to a virtual object of another kind*, one which constantly circulates and is displaced in them ... Repetition is constituted not from one present to another, but between the two coexistent series that these presents form in function of the virtual object (object = x).<sup>2</sup>

With regard to *Billy Bathgate*, the film does not “repeat” the novel on which it is based; rather, they both “repeat” the unrepeatable virtual X, the “true” novel whose specter is engendered in the passage from the actual novel to the film. This virtual point of reference, although “unreal,” is in a way more real than reality: it is the *absolute* point of reference of the failed real attempts. The inexistent “better book” is what both existing works repeat (and fail in their endeavor to repeat), it is what maintains a distance between the two, the interruption between the two that is their Unconscious. And, back to our topic, can the machine to which our brain is wired capture this virtual moment which belongs neither to the order of being, nor to the order of non-being?

In Schumann's “Humoresque,” we have, in the written score, the famous “inner voice/*innere Stimme*,” a third line between the two piano lines, higher and lower. This absent line is to be reconstructed on the basis of the fact that the first and third levels (the right- and

the left-hand piano lines) do not relate to each other directly, i.e. their relationship is not that of an immediate mirroring: in order to account for their interconnection, one is thus compelled to (re)construct a third, “virtual” intermediate level (melodic line) which, for structural reasons, cannot be played. Schumann brings this procedure of absent melody to an apparently absurd self-reference when, later in the same fragment of “Humoresque,” he repeats the same two effectively played melodic lines, yet this time the score contains no third absent melodic line, no inner voice – what is absent here is the absent melody, i.e. absence itself. How are we to play these notes when, at the level of what is effectively to be played, they exactly repeat the previous notes? The effectively played notes are deprived only of what is not there, of their constitutive lack, or, to refer to the Bible, they lose even that what they never had. A true pianist should thus have the *savoir-faire* to play the existing, positive, notes in such a way that one would be able to discern the echo of the accompanying non-played “silent” virtual notes or their absence ... which exactly fits the conscious speech in which the virtual unconscious chain echoes. Recall Freud’s “a child is being beaten” fantasy: does this middle line of notes not meant to be played not fit exactly the middle form of the fantasy (“my father is beating me”) which is also not meant to be experienced but just operates as a purely virtual construct?

Let’s take another example in these series, *Captive State* (2019, directed by Rupert Wyatt and co-written by Wyatt and Erica Beene), an excellent science-fiction thriller which begins in 2019 when extraterrestrials invade the globe and Chicago is placed under martial law. Nine years later, the world has capitulated to the invaders and submitted to their governing authority; they are called “The Legislators” because all subsequent laws and rules of governance come from them. In the years after Earth’s surrender, the aliens have conscripted humans to build suitable habitats for them far underground called Closed Zones, walled off from the rest of the city with access only granted to high government officials. “While the new ‘legislators’ remain in their underground lairs, obedient quislings in government and law enforcement maintain tyrannical control over the populace. The majority of humans have

accepted the many apparent benefits (strong economy, diminished unemployment, etc.) of extraterrestrial rule. A lavish pep rally, complete with a new and invader-stroking version of ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’, tells us all we need to know about how easily the sheep have been corralled.”<sup>3</sup> We have to skip here many interesting features of this outstanding film (the action mostly takes place in decrepit Chicago suburbs among poor black boys; although events take place in the near future, reality is strangely moved backwards in time since the legislators have prohibited digital technology) and focus on the two levels implied by the narrative: the film’s fictional universe (yet another story about the resistance against an alien invasion) obviously refers to our reality of impersonal corporate rule. It is, however, wrong to see the fictional element as simply mirroring our reality – there is a third level in-between the two. The aliens-rule-us dimension is not just a fictional version of our reality, it is an immanent component of this reality itself: do we, individuals caught up in corporate rule, not experience it as some kind of alien force dwelling in Closed Zones and dealing with us only through their “quislings” among us? In-between reality and (science-)fiction, there is thus the fictional component constitutive of our reality itself.

We encounter the same triadic structure in *The Whip Hand* (William Cameron Menzies, 1951), a noir masterpiece in which a rainstorm soaks a vacationing fisherman in northern Minnesota, close to the Canadian border. He becomes a refugee in a local town and asks for help in getting treatment for a head injury sustained when he fell against a rock. The townfolk refuse to be more than perfunctorily friendly (with the exception of a superficially outgoing and jokey innkeeper superbly played by Raymond Burr), and are continually contradicting one another. It seems there are strange goings-on at a lodge across the lake – there are nocturnal visits to the lodge by a doctor, who doesn’t want to talk about it. As things turn out, Communists have already taken over the town and turned it into a center for the study of germ warfare ... The interest of this rather ridiculous Howard Hughes production is that it should be read as a reflexive inversion of the standard thesis according to which the “invasion-of-the-aliens” formula of the early 1950s (the ordinary

American who, by chance, finds himself in a small American town gradually discovers that the town is already controlled by the aliens) is the allegory of the Communist takeover (“aliens” stand for Communists): here, the allegory is translated back into its “true meaning,” with the easily predicted result that *the Communist plotters themselves are haunted by the aura of “aliens.”* This is why the meaning of a metaphor cannot be reduced to its “true” reference: it is not enough to point out the *reality* to which a metaphor refers; once the metaphoric substitution is accomplished, this reality itself is forever haunted by the spectral *real* of the metaphoric content. In both cases, the third element (fiction immanent to reality itself) is the site of the Unconscious.

To further clarify this status of the Unconscious, let’s recall the famous joke from Ernst Lubitsch’s *Ninotchka*: “Waiter! A cup of coffee without cream, please!’ ‘I’m sorry, sir, we have no cream, only milk, so can it be a coffee without milk?’” At the factual level, coffee remains the same coffee, but what we can change is to make the coffee without cream into a coffee without milk – or, more simply even, to add the implied negation and to make the plain coffee into a coffee without milk. The difference between “plain coffee” and “coffee without milk” is purely virtual, there is no difference in the real cup of coffee, and exactly the same goes for the Freudian unconscious: its status is also purely virtual, it is not a “deeper” psychic reality – in short, unconscious is like “milk” in “coffee without milk.” And therein resides the catch: can the digital big Other which knows us better than we know ourselves also discern the difference between “plain coffee” and “coffee without milk”? Or is the counterfactual sphere outside the scope of the digital big Other which is constrained to facts in our brain and social environs that we are unaware of? The primary conflict is thus not between my inner experience and the digital big Other, but between the two big Others: the symbolic-virtual big Other and the real-mechanic big Other. What a digital machine can do is something like the following imagined example:

Let’s say we have a coffee machine with three buttons: “Plain coffee”, “Coffee with milk”, “Coffee with cream”. It records all user activities and registers the most frequent choice of every user. Let’s say I regularly ordered “coffee with milk” every day for a

month and the machine has recorded “coffee with milk” as my most frequent choice. One day, I happened to want “coffee without milk” and pressed the button “Plain coffee”. It’s appropriate to call this exceptional choice “coffee without milk” because it is defined by its extraordinary difference to my ordinary choice “coffee with milk”. Since the machine has a record of my most frequent choice, it “knows” that this “plain coffee” is in fact “coffee without milk” and it can even display me a message: “Interesting, you’re having your coffee without milk today!” So a machine can (at least) discern the times that a very frequent event fails to re-occur, and it can register this as a virtual negativity.<sup>4</sup>

This example, however, does not fit the precise conditions of the joke from *Ninotchka* – to make this joke fit our example, the waiter should have replied to the customer something like: “Just to make sure, sir, you’re having your coffee without cream today, not with cream as usual?” In short, what a digital machine can do is to include a horizon of expectation: if a subject is expected to do something (and this expectation is based on its past repetitive acts), then its not-doing it can be registered as a “without.” What a digital machine doesn’t seem to be able to do is to register an original failure, an original not-doing it – a case when not doing something accompanies from the very beginning what a subject does. But the key feature missing in this example is the redoubling of “without” which gives rise to a strange negation of negation: in the joke, it is not only the opposition between milk and without milk, but the concatenation of two withouts, without cream and without milk. (My source for the example also mentions the case of “coffee without cream,” but simply as another case, with no link to the first one, just as a parallel case of the same structure.) It is thus a crucial feature of the joke that, in it, because they don’t have cream in the cafeteria, the “without cream” is replaced by “without milk” – the (plain) coffee that the customer gets thus gives body to a double negation, i.e., the first negation (“without cream”) is itself negated (since there is no cream there to be negated), so that the “coffee without milk” that the customer gets is the coffee “without without-cream” – and this is what, arguably, the digital space cannot evoke. With regard to the



Unconscious, in it, we are dealing with a homologous double negation: when I fantasize about something that doesn't exist, I fantasize about something whose non-existence replaces the more radical non-existence of the (incestuous) Thing itself. To paraphrase Freud's own famous example, in an incestuous dream, its message is something like: "Sorry, but in the space of a dream, Mother is not here even as absent, so I cannot give you a dream without mother – I can only give you a dream without another woman who is not your mother..."

All the nuances of experiences could well be registered by the digital machine, but what will not be possible is to register the impossible itself, something that doesn't exist in itself but only persists in a shady domain of neither-being-nor-nonbeing as a virtual point of reference. Is the real *qua* construct not something that doesn't exist, that insists only as a point in a formal structure? When for example, the subject actually experiences a series of fantasmatic formations which interrelate as so many permutations of each other, this series is never complete: it is always as if the actually experienced series presents so many variations of some underlying "fundamental" fantasy which is *never* actually experienced by the subject. Back to Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten" fantasy, the two consciously experienced fantasies presuppose and thus relate to a third one, "My father is beating me," which was never actually experienced and can only be retroactively reconstructed as the presupposed reference of – or, in this case, the intermediate term between – the other two fantasies.

But let us again play devil's advocate: if the digital machine can reproduce the incoherent multiplicity of my experience, inclusive of the failures and limitations inscribed into it, why couldn't it in this way also evoke (or engender in the recipient's mind, i.e., in the mind of the other individual with whom I share my experience) the "absentals," the virtual points of reference that sustain the flux of my experience? Back to the *Ninotchka* joke: let's say that I imagine in my mind telling this joke, and that the digital machine reproduces my line of thought in another's mind – would this other also not get the notion of "coffee without milk" as distinct from "coffee without cream" as well as from "plain coffee"? The answer is no: the transmission of

virtual absentials would only work if we presume that, even if my brain is wired, the thought processes of my mind remain the processes that take place in a singular subject isolated from others, separated from them by what the early Lacan called “the wall of language.” The moment this wall crumbles, the moment the effects of what the Bible calls the Fall are undone, the virtual dimension also disappears. Imagine a seduction scene between two subjects whose brains are wired so that the other’s train of thoughts is accessible to me: if my prospective partner can directly experience my intention, what remains of the intricacies of seduction games? Will the other not react with something like: “OK, I know you desperately want to fuck me, so why are you asking me all those stupid things about the movies I like and what I would like to have for dinner? Can’t you feel that I would never have sex with you?”

The difference we are dealing with here is the difference between the “unconscious” (neuronal, social ...) facts that determine us and the Freudian “unconscious” whose status is purely counterfactual. In our sexual dreams, we fantasize about the best sex we never had, not about the best sex we ever had. And is this play with virtual absentials not brought to extreme in the already-mentioned figure of courtly love? When the two lovers endlessly postpone the completion of the sexual act, they don’t simply limit themselves to talk and soft preliminary forms of interplay. Their entire activity is positively defined as the sexual version of “coffee without cream” – as sexual activity without the sexual act.

What makes things even more complex here is that, in courtly love, the status of the surplus-enjoyment changes with regard to its standard functioning. Darian Leader<sup>5</sup> mentioned an anecdote from his analytic work, when a patient reported to him a slip of tongue that embarrassed him: he was taking a lady to a restaurant in a luxury hotel, secretly planning to take her to a room for sex after lunch; when a waiter approached them, the patient said “A bed for two, please!” instead of “A table for two, please!” Leader rejects the obvious “Freudian” reading (i.e., that his real wish for sex erupted directly) and proposes the opposite: the slip of tongue should be read as a warning not to enjoy the food too much, as a reminder that the shared lunch is just a pretext, a *Vorlust*, and that the true goal is

sex. The slip of tongue was thus a desperate attempt to repress the gnawing suspicion that even sex is not “the real thing,” that something is missing in it also. We get here the standard relationship between the “basic” pleasure (the sexual act) and the detours and foreplays which add surplus-enjoyment. In courtly love, however, the “basic” sexual activity is reduced to the detours and foreplays, so that the “full” sexual act itself acquires the status of an impossible and endlessly postponed excess.

This domain of counterfactuals can only be operative if subjectivity is here: in order to register the difference between “plain coffee” and “coffee without milk,” a subject has to be operative. Subjectivity equals here reflexivity: when plain coffee is experienced as “coffee without milk” (and not “coffee without cream”), the counterfactual status of milk or cream is this coffee’s purely reflexive determination, not its actual determination.

What this virtual/reflexive status of the Unconscious means is that the Unconscious is not some primitive pre-reflexive substantial content to be reflexively appropriated by the subject in an act of self-consciousness (of becoming aware of its “repressed” psychic content). “Unconscious” is the immanent structure of self-consciousness itself: what eludes the subject’s consciousness is the basic level of its self-consciousness. To arrive at this level, the structure of self-consciousness has to be exploded from within and, in this way, radically distanced from conscious self-awareness. What this means is that, at its most radical, self-consciousness is a misnomer: it is not self-awareness but the unconscious reflexivity with regard to some conscious content. It is in this sense that Lacan emphasizes how desire is always also a desire to desire – every desire is by definition reflexive, it includes a reflexive stance towards itself: when I say “I desire that,” it is never an external report on my immediate propensity since it always includes its own reflexive redoubling (do I desire to desire that?). “Unconscious” is not the content of my desire but my reflexive stance towards it.

Self-consciousness is not just a redoubled consciousness, the awareness of the fact that I am aware of things, so that another object – myself – is included in the scope of objects I am conscious of. Self-consciousness always implies what is traditionally referred to

as the normative dimension, the dimension of subjective commitment: “The subjective form of judgment, the ‘I think’ that Kant says can accompany all our representations, and so is the emptiest of all, marks who takes responsibility for the judgment.”<sup>6</sup> Self-consciousness means that, even in the case of a simple statement of a fact like “there is a tree in front of my house,” I presuppose myself as standing behind this statement, as committed to it.<sup>7</sup> And Lacan’s point is that exactly the same goes for our desire: desire is never just a fact of my inner life, I can never refer to it as to a fact, I am fully implied in it as a subject. In this precise sense, even the most unconscious desire is always “self-conscious”: I don’t just desire something as a fact, I desire (or not) to desire it. In his ethical revolution, Kant claimed that duty itself cannot serve as an excuse to do my duty – one is never allowed to say: “I know this is heavy and can be painful, but what can I do, this is my duty ...” Kant’s ethics of unconditional duty is often taken as justifying such an attitude – no wonder Adolf Eichmann himself referred to Kantian ethics when he tried to justify his role in planning and executing the Holocaust: he was just doing his duty and obeying the *Fuhrer’s* orders. However, the aim of Kant’s emphasis on the subject’s full moral autonomy and responsibility is precisely to prevent any such maneuver of putting the blame onto some figure of the big Other. The standard motto of ethical rigor is: “There is no excuse for not accomplishing one’s duty!” Although Kant’s well-known maxim *Du kannst, denn du sollst!* (“You can, because you must!”) seems to offer a new version of this motto, he implicitly complements it with its much more uncanny inversion: “There is no excuse for accomplishing one’s duty!” The very reference to duty as the excuse to do my duty should be rejected as hypocritical. This is why, for Lacan, Kant is at the origin of the spiritual development which gave birth to psychoanalysis: in psychoanalysis also, the patient is never allowed to say “What can I do, my Unconscious determines my acts, I am not responsible for them!” – I am fully implied in my unconscious desires.

But what has all this to do with neuralink and Singularity? We had to describe the intricate reflexive structure of self-consciousness to approach the key question: if we imagine the subject’s immersion in Singularity, will the digital big Other be able to capture this reflexive

dimension or not? And if not, will this mean that the reflexive dimension of subjectivity will simply disappear, or will it persist as something that will resist its immersion in Singularity? Surprisingly (or not for those who know Beckett's work), Beckett's *Unnamable* shows us the way here.

## 7

### A Literary Fantasy

#### The Unnamable Subject of Singularity

One should risk a daring hypothesis here: what if Singularity is not (or, rather, will not be) an immersion in a collective space but an extremely solipsistic state where each Self (reduced to its selflessness, no longer a self as opposed to others in an intersubjective space) will function similar to what Beckett renders in *The Unnamable* – we read here Beckett with Jacques-Alain Miller who, in his seminar of 2006–2007, describes the effort of Lacan's last years to delineate the contours of One alone before the Other, of a hallucination before symbolic reality, of meaningless lapses prior to any signifying articulation.<sup>1</sup> Lacan opposes here two axes. One is the axis of the symbolic Unconscious where, in transference, the subject relates to an Other, where symptoms have a (supposed) meaning and, as such, wait to be historicized, integrated into a symbolic narrative. The other is the axis of the real Unconscious where the subject (or, rather, the subjectless Self) is all alone:

Who is this self? – this self that knows that it has neither tail nor head, neither meaning nor interpretation. We have here an it that is not, as Lacan was able to play with it, the one of the unconscious, but an it that is a self.”<sup>2</sup> “The pivot is that here, one considers the One-all-alone. At least two allusions from Lacan, in this text, find a way to be ordered from this all-alone. He says: “There is no friendship there, in that space that supports this unconscious.” No friendship that can be the support of the unconscious.<sup>3</sup>

“Friendship” stands here for the link from the one to the other, between subjects but also between signifiers – signification arises

only through such “friendship” where one signifier interprets the other.<sup>4</sup> With the subjectless Self that is all alone, there is also speech, but this speech functions as pre-symbolic erratic hallucination, a hallucination without law: “The hallucination does not obey the laws of language, either those of connection or of substitution, and it appears as being independent of the intersubjective game.”<sup>5</sup> So, again, on the one side, we have the intersubjective game of transference through which symptoms are decoded in their meaning and thus historicized, integrated into the subject’s life story, and, on the other side,

we have a real cut off from speech, a real which “expects nothing from speech,” and which “chatters all alone” (*cause tout seul*). We know now to give its value to this all alone, which signals that we are not in history, in hysteria, in the one and the other, but, on the contrary, on the side of the solitary. Lacan even adds that the real appears as a “noise in which one can hear anything and everything”.<sup>6</sup>

This difference between speech as symptom pointing towards meaning, and speech as “chatter all alone,” composed of *sinthomes* which just condense *jouissance*, does not overlap with the opposition between hysteria and psychosis; it divides the space of psychosis itself into paranoia (in which signifying mechanisms of retroaction are still operative) and schizophrenia in which “the symbolic ceases making sense, making history, where the symbolic is at the level of the noise in which one can hear anything whatever. It is a collapse of the two dimensions: the symbolic founders on the real.”<sup>7</sup> This is also why we are here in the domain of hallucinations: when the symbolic “founders on the real,” reality (by definition sustained by a gap that separates the symbolic from the real) disintegrates, the subject suffers a “loss of reality (*Realitaetsverlust*).”

Can we imagine how such “chatter” looks? Here we should turn to *The Unnamable* as Beckett’s Cartesian meditation.<sup>8</sup> The contrast with Descartes immediately strikes the eye: in Descartes, the reduction to “I think,” to pure flow of immanent thoughts, is a starting point of rational insight which immediately brings us to god and to

the well-ordered structure of reality; but it is as if Beckett remains stuck at *cogito* as One, at its zero-level, and persists in it without the Other who would guarantee the rational order of the universe. This is why, in *The Unnamable*, we never pass to (fully constituted) reality, the universe in which the narrator dwells is precisely that of erratic hallucinations. Andrew Cutrofello<sup>9</sup> suggested that Hamlet's stance of procrastination can also be formulated in Bartleby's terms: "I would prefer not to ... revenge my father." Could the stance of *The Unnamable* also not be put in the same terms? "I would prefer not to ... be or think."

This link to Descartes is not just an external interpretation: Beckett's knowledge of Descartes is well known, and a number of critics have already remarked that *The Unnamable* is a Cartesian *cogito*, if a highly unusual and unstable one, a sentient being who finds himself in the black box of his own consciousness, and its problem is: "how does the unnameable escape being, the pain commensurate with being, how does he exit the labyrinth of language he finds himself in?" Here things get complicated, because Beckett does not just stage *cogito*; through this staging, he simultaneously (as a good Hegelian) brings out its inner distinctions and tensions, which we may use as astute indications of what awaits us in Singularity.

To begin with, Beckett immediately notices that this unnamable *cogito* is not happily floating in its hallucinations but is radically divided: it is not speaking, speech itself is imposed on it from outside, it is spoken (as Lacan would have put it), dominated by an external Other, Beckett's version of Descartes's *malin génie*, which manipulates my hallucinations – or, as Deleuze put it apropos Beckett and his use of language: "it is always an Other who speaks, since words have not expected/waited for me and there is no language other than the foreign."<sup>10</sup> In short, the unnamable "supposes that language comes to him purely from the other, that it passes through him and does not belong to him."<sup>11</sup> So how does the unnamable try to find its way in this mess? Here Beckett proposes his dialectics of speech and silence: there is no chance for the unnamable to appropriate speech, to make it its own and fully



express itself in it. All the unnamable can hope for is “to be able to escape the torment of talking interminably by stating (through sheer chance) something which is required to be stated to end that torment.”<sup>12</sup> But this moment never arrives, and it always ends with the claim that it must go on. So “the question remains in suspension, we are unable to think language as either finite or infinite,” and the reality remains that of an endless erratic hallucination of (external, not my own) voices:

It must not be forgotten, sometimes I forget, that all is a question of voices. I say what I am told to say, in the hope that someday they will weary of talking of me ... Do they believe I believe it is I who am speaking? That's theirs too. To make me believe I have an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs.<sup>13</sup>

Again, our hypothesis is that such a tension may characterize our immersion in a Singularity. If we leave aside the further redoubling of the unnamable into Mahood and Worm (a redoubling which echoes the gap that *separates* speech from silence), the dilemma that arises here is: is speech a violent act that disturbs the peace of violence, or is the worst violence peace itself? The silence the unnamable desires is not just any silence: “For it is all very fine to keep silence, but one has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps.”<sup>14</sup> The silence the unnamable desires is the seemingly irretrievable silence that is the silence before speech, the silence before the possibility of violence: “silence once broken will never again be whole.”<sup>15</sup> Here, however, Beckett himself misses the point in his oft-quoted statement: “Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.” What Beckett doesn't get is that when a stain appears as unnecessary, superfluous, it remains unavoidable – it creates retroactively the silence it stains/disturbs. Yes, words are by definition inadequate, but they retroactively create the very standard with regard to which they appear as inadequate.

*The Unnamable* has traditionally been read as a narrative from beyond death: insofar as Beckett's three novels *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* comprise a trilogy, *The Unnamable* follows *Malone Dies*. But it is important to note that the beyond death here is

not beyond, it involves language, consciousness, it is tied to being and lived experience, so it would be more adequate to locate the unnamable in the domain between the two deaths, the domain of the living dead or the undead. Just as the unnamable comes between silence and language, the same and the other, the inside and the outside, it comes between life and death:

perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either.<sup>16</sup>

The final deadlock is thus the ontological one: Beckett "leads us through a maze of language and alludes to a threshold, but it cannot be crossed because there is nothing with which to cross, nothing to cross." We are taken "to the edge of the universe but there is no spear to throw, no hand to stretch through the surface of heaven which encloses the unnamable like a wall, no way of telling if we are facing a void or its opposite," or, to quote Beckett himself:

may not this screen which my eyes probe in vain, and see as denser air, in reality be the enclosure wall, as compact as lead? To elucidate this point I would need a stick or pole, and the means of plying it ... Then I would dart it, like a javelin, straight before me and know, by the sound made, whether that which hems me round, and blots out my world, is the old void, or a plenum.<sup>17</sup>

This brings us yet again to the question that perennially haunts this book: why Hegel? Why the reference to Hegel to understand such a singularly non-Hegelian phenomenon like Singularity? Let's take the example of the passage from silent movies to talking movies: those who resisted this passage saw much more clearly its implications. That is to say, what was the effect of adding the soundtrack to the silent film? The exact opposite of the expected "naturalization," i.e.,

of an even more “realistic” imitation of reality. What took place from the very beginning of the sound film was an uncanny voice baptized by Michel Chion “acousmatique”:<sup>18</sup> a voice that is neither attached to an object (a person) within diegetic reality nor simply the voice of an external commentator, but a spectral voice which floats freely in a mysterious intermediate domain and thereby acquires the horrifying dimension of omnipresence and omnipotence, the voice of an invisible Master – from Fritz Lang’s *Testament des Dr. Mabuse* to the “mother’s voice” in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. Those who resisted talking movies – from the Russian avant garde up to Charlie Chaplin – perceived much more clearly the uncanny dimensions of what was going on. For almost ten years Chaplin resisted making a full sound movie. In *City Lights*, his first film with a soundtrack, there are only music and some noises of objects, no speech. Then in *Modern Times*, there is speech, but only when it is reproduced by a machine (radio, loudspeaker) shown on screen. Only with *The Great Dictator* do we get speaking actors – but who are they? The main agent of speech is Hynkel (Hitler) with his wild violent shouting, first heard through loudspeakers ... Chaplin thus clearly perceived the threatening and destabilizing dimension of the voice which functions as a kind of spectral living dead, while the idiotic proponents of sound cinema perceived the situation in simple realist terms (“Fine, now that we also have sound, we can reproduce reality in a more realist convincing way”), ignoring the gap that appeared with sound.

And something similar is going on with the prospect of Singularity: against Kurzweil and other proponents of Singularity as harmonious floating in a divine bliss, we should discern in it a radical split – what split? A brief return to Beckett might be of some help here: *The Unnamable* is split into two (probably virtual, hallucinated) entities, Mahood and Worm:

The stories of Mahood and Worm might be said to loosely describe two philosophical poles: Idealism and Materialism. The story of Mahood in his jar might be read as a parable following the ideas of Beckett’s compatriot Bishop Berkeley. Beckett was later to use Berkeley’s most famous premise *esse est percipi* as a point of departure for his screenplay Film. To be is to be perceived: once

Mahood feels himself no longer perceived he disappears (a state of matter is reduced to a state of mind). But this disappearance suggests that Mahood has no self-perception, that the state of mind of this same is not his own state of mind but that of others; Mahood stops existing because “they” no longer believe in him, not because he no longer believes in himself. To this extent he is like Worm: “Worm is, since we conceive him, as if there could be no being but being conceived”. Neither the Idealism nor the Materialism is pure, then, but the opposition seems clear enough. At an opposite pole to Mahood, Worm is a materialist being. His is a state of mind reduced to a state of matter, he is pre-conscious being, a thing, a creature that sleeps, pure matter without mind, pure matter which has mind brutally branded upon it. Worm begins life as “pupil Mahood”, a blank slate “they” attempt to inscribe with language.<sup>[19](#)</sup>

So, again: why will subject not disappear in Singularity? Because once differentiability is here, once we are in its space, the very disappearance continues to persist – not as a positive fact but as an absential. So if we accept that a minimal form of subjectivity survives the immersion in Singularity, we can surmise that a subject in Singularity will also be divided into “Mahood” (solipsist floating in the communal space of shared thoughts) and “Worm” (the thoughtless reality). It will never just float in it: insofar as it survives as subject, it will remain aware of itself as (also) an inert worm-like object (part of digital-neuronal machinery). This radical gap between pure immanence (I am Mahood, a flow of selfless thoughts) and full objectivization (I am Worm, part of the neuronal machine) is not just “objective,” it is immanent to subject: through this objectivization (and being aware of it), the subject as “empty” \$ persists in its minimal distance from Singularity. We should return here to the Soviet techno-gnosticism which, in an exact parallel to the duality of Mahood and Worm, saw the new post-human entity as the combination of trans-personal awareness and “objective” distance towards one’s own body: trans-personal unity is accompanied by the radical gap between me and my embodied existence – I may be part of the same trans-personal awareness, but the price I pay is that I

lose my personal unity and relate to my body as an object in the world.

At this point, we can even reach back from Beckett to the beginnings of the Western tradition, to a unique text in which the contours of post-human subjectivity are first clearly outlined: Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*. What if the passage from humanity to post-humanity is the passage from *Oedipus Rex* to *Oedipus at Colonus*? If the human subject is Oedipal (with all this implies: constitution through symbolic castration, regulation of desire through the symbolic Law, etc.), post-human subject is like *Oedipus at Colonus*, "anti-Oedipus" or, as Lacan put it, beyond Oedipus, reduced to an excremental remainder of the signifying chain,<sup>20</sup> the chain now embodied in the collective space of Singularity.

Things are more complex than they may appear already with Oedipus before Colonus. Many perspicuous observers have noted that, with regard to the classic tragic structure, the Oedipus story is an exception. In the classic structure, the hero unknowingly commits a crime, but then he subjectivizes his act, he heroically assumes guilt for it and dies a tragic death. Psychoanalysis can easily explain the hero's guilt for accomplishing an act which was not his free decision but his fate predetermined by gods (or historical necessity, as Stalinists liked to say): the subject is guilty due to the enjoyment he finds in doing what is imposed on him, since he gets this enjoyment as a surplus, without being responsible for it. Take the Stalinist executioner who personally doesn't like cruelty, but has to carry out the liquidations because History demands it – the "objective historical necessity" to which he refers is constituted through his recognition of it. The same goes for a teacher who feels obliged to cruelly punish and discipline his pupils "for their own good," although (he claims) he doesn't like doing it: "it is desire which supports objective necessity, fate: it is subject's desire which confers consistency onto the big Other and its Will."<sup>21</sup> So it is not that "you will suffer your fate if you want it or not," your desire is constitutive of the very "objectivity" of your fate: you desire it precisely as an "objective" fact which absolves you of the responsibility for it.

It may appear that the same holds for Oedipus: he got what he desired (killing his father and sleeping with his mother) without

knowing they were his father and mother – however, upon a closer look, we quickly see that this is not what Oedipus does. As Hegel put it, guilt is the highest honor for the tragic hero – if we deprive him of his guilt, we submit him to a thorough humiliation – and Oedipus is deprived even of this honor of guilt, which means that “he is not even allowed to participate in his fate with his desire.”<sup>22</sup> There was no “unconscious desire” in him that pushed him to his acts, which is why, after learning what he did, he refused to act as a tragic hero and to assume his guilt. As Lacan put it repeatedly, in contrast to all of us, Oedipus is the only one without an Oedipus complex. In the usual Oedipal scenario, we compromise our desire by submitting ourselves to the symbolic Law, renouncing the true (incestuous) object of desire. Oedipus at Colonus, on the contrary, remains stubborn to the end, fully faithful to his desire, *il n’a pas cede sur son desir*. At Colonus, he is not a wise old man who learns the vanity of desire, he only here accedes to it fully.

As Lacan pointed out, Oedipus doesn’t have the Oedipus complex, but Hamlet does have it, fully (witness his long confrontation with his mother in the middle of the play). Both stories, Oedipus’s and Hamlet’s, are universal myths found from Africa and Polynesia to Nordic countries, but in Sophocles and in Shakespeare, they get a different spin. In Sophocles’s version, Oedipus answers the Sphinx’s riddle and thereby pushes it to destroy itself – a unique “philosophical” turn of the myth.<sup>23</sup> (Moreover, Oedipus’s answer is strictly wrong in the sense of false philosophical universality which obfuscates the singularity of truth: the correct answer is not “man” (in general) but Oedipus himself who as a young child crawled on all fours because he was crippled and who, as an old blind man, had to lean on Antigone to be able to walk.) Hamlet’s myth is also universal, there are even interpretations which indicate that it originally referred to precession in the circular movement of planets, i.e., to a glitch, an imbalance, in the circular movement of our cosmos itself.<sup>24</sup> But in premodern versions, Hamlet’s revenge simply re-establishes the harmony disturbed by the uncle’s murder of the father: as in *The Lion King*, the son kills the uncle and takes over the throne, and the world is thereby no longer out of joint but set straight again – we are



firmly in the circular movement of a disturbance and its correction. In Shakespeare, however, the deadlock remains, there is no return to the lost balance. In a way that is homologous to Oedipus's wrong answer to the riddle of the Sphinx, Hamlet doesn't see that the element "out of joint" in his world is ultimately himself, the negativity that defines his status as a subject. This is how we should read his famous line "to be or not to be, that is the question": in an echo of Descartes's *cogito, ergo sum*, it should be supplemented by "to think or not to think, that is the question." Hamlet as a subject neither is (as a determinate object in the world), nor does he think (determinate thoughts): all his being resides in the fleeting and elusive moment of "I think," and all his thinking is reduced to the bare minimum of "I am." Both easy choices – "to be and not to think" (like the Worm in Beckett) and "to think and not to be" (like Mahood) – elude him, he is a pure spectral entity which dwells in the intermediate domain of neither living nor dead.

And our question here is: how are we, as desiring pure subjects, neither alive nor dead, caught in the passage to Singularity? For Lacan, in contrast to neutral objective truth, analytic interpretation is like an oracle which becomes true only with regard to its effects – say, the fate foretold to Oedipus's father becomes true through his efforts to avoid it. Avoidance was thus part of the plan, which means that, when fate is announced to a subject in a prophetic oracle, if the subject does not want to compromise his desire he does not try to escape it, but rather persists in it – if Oedipus's father were to avoid attempts to escape fate and heroically accept it, it would not have happened. Does the same hold for the catastrophic prospects of Singularity? Could they also actualize themselves through our very attempts to avoid them? One thing is for sure: if Singularity is our Fate, we should heroically accept it, but without investing our desire in it. Maybe, insofar as Singularity is in some sense incestuous (in it, we lose our distance from reality and others), and insofar as incest is not just prohibited but impossible (even if I effectively sleep with my mother, I discover that she is not *the* Mother, the ultimate object of desire), what we shall experience by way of immersing ourselves in Singularity is this ultimate gap, the gap between empirical mother and Mother-Thing. Furthermore, insofar as our emergence ("birth")

as symbolic subjects occurs through acquiring distance from reality, our immersion in Singularity will equal the undoing of our birth – we'll achieve what is, as the Chorus says in Oedipus at Colonus, our best fate:

Not to be born at all  
Is best, far best that can befall,  
Next best, when born, with least delay  
To trace the backward way.  
For when youth passes with its giddy train,  
Troubles on troubles follow, toils on toils,  
Pain, pain forever pain;  
And none escapes life's coils.  
Envy, sedition, strife,  
Carnage and war, make up the tale of life.<sup>[25](#)</sup>

(Incidentally, one should not refrain here from engaging in a bit of bad taste humor: could these famous chorus lines about how the greatest luck is not being born at all not be actualized today as the best argument for abortion? “Do you worry about the kind of world your child will live in? We can secure its greatest luck by aborting it ...”<sup>[26](#)</sup>) If the best thing that can happen to us is not being born in the first place, then our being born is already a kind of failure, the failure of being born, the failure to achieve the optimal state of not being born at all – it is not the lack of being which is a failed being, it is our being itself which is our failure to achieve non-being.<sup>[27](#)</sup> In other words, our being is immanently measured by the counterfactual hypothesis of non-being. One should not be afraid to draw radical ontological consequences from this reversal. According to the standard ontological configuration, entities strive for perfection, their goal is to actualize their potential, to become fully what they are, and the lack of being signals the failure of a thing to fully realize its potentials. This configuration has to be turned around: being as such (in the sense of being a determinate entity) signals a failure, everything that is (as a particular entity) is marked by a failure, and the only way to achieve perfection is to immerse oneself into the void of no-being.



What we have to consider here is the fact (as well as one of the great topics of Beckett) that one can also live as not-yet-fully-born or, to put it in more philosophical terms, as failing to achieve one's full identity, to become what one effectively is. The alternative that confronts us here is: how does the couple born/not-fully-born relate to the couple of human and post-human? Are we, humans, in some sense not yet fully born, a fuzzy and inconsistent intermediary state of being between animality and post-humanity (as the predominant ideology of Singularity implies), or are we as humans in some sense fully human, and will the passage into post-human Singularity involve some kind of regression into a state of not-being-fully-born as human individuals? Our reference to Beckett's *The Unnamable* points in this direction: will subjectivity that is immersed in Singularity not function as a version of the Cartesian *cogito* which remains stuck in solipsist hallucinations and fails to pass over into a Self that relates to a constituted objective reality? However, the opposite version also holds: we exist as humans, embedded in our reality, precisely as unborn, ontologically incomplete, i.e., precisely insofar as our human existence is marked by a constitutive failure; and in post-humanity we get stuck in a limbo of not-yet-being born precisely insofar as we achieve our identity in being immersed in the shared space of Singularity.

To orient ourselves in this mess, we should radically change the terrain and risk a turn to the politico-economic dimension: is this reduction/withdrawal to One caught into its erratic hallucinations theorized by Miller and staged in Beckett's writing, not strictly correlative to an anonymous system of (capitalist) social domination embedded in the machinery of digital and neuronal control, is it not its subjective counterpart? Miller himself gives hints in this direction when he repeatedly varies the motif of today's capitalism as a dynamic process which takes place in a lawless real, constantly undermining all symbolic regulations; he quotes the famous description of the capitalist dynamics from *The Communist Manifesto* as the appropriate description of the capitalist real outside law:

the best description of what we are plainly experiencing now, remains the one that Karl Marx gave in his *Communist Manifesto* of the revolutionary effects of the discourse of capitalism –

revolutionary effects on civilizations. I would like to read some phrases of Marx that assist a reflection on the real: “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without the condition of incessant revolution of the instruments of production, and thereby of the relations of production, and with them all social relations ... There is an incessant disturbance of all social conditions, constant uncertainty and agitation ... All fixed and ossified relations with their train of beliefs and ideas venerated for centuries are swept away ...” – the clearest expression of the break with tradition. “All that is solid vanishes into the air, everything sacred is profaned.” I would say that capitalism and science combine, they have combined, to make nature disappear. And what is left by the vanishing of nature, what is left is that which we call the real, that is, a remainder. And, by structure, disordered. The real is touched on all sides by the advances of the binary capitalism-science, in a disordered way, randomly, without being able to recuperate any idea of harmony.<sup>28</sup>

It is against this background that one should understand Jacques-Alain Miller’s thesis: “*Il y’a un grand desordre dans le reel*”<sup>29</sup> (“There is a great disorder in the real”). That’s how Miller characterizes the way reality appears to us in our time in which we experience the full impact of two fundamental agents, modern science and capitalism. Nature as the real in which everything, from stars to the sun, always returns to its proper place, as the realm of large reliable cycles and of stable laws regulating them, is being replaced by a thoroughly contingent real, real outside the Law, real that is permanently revolutionizing its own rules, real that resists any inclusion in a totalized World (universe of meaning), which is why Badiou characterized capitalism as the first world-less civilization.

Here, however, problems arise. Miller claims that the pure lawless Real resists symbolic grasp, so that we should always be aware that our attempts to conceptualize it are mere semblances, defensive elucubrations – but what if there is still an underlying order that generates this disorder, a matrix that provides its coordinates? This is what also accounts for the repetitive sameness of the capitalist dynamics: the more things change, the more they stay the same. In

short, what Miller ignores is that the obverse of the breathtaking capitalist dynamics is a clearly recognizable order of hierarchic domination. This holds also for our sexuality: it is chaotic, permissive, lawless, but administered more than ever through PC rules ...

And was Marx not after precisely the rules, the *laws* of this capitalist real? Class antagonism is not a symbolic elucubration on the lawless real of social life but the name of the antagonism obfuscated by ideologico-political formations. In equating capitalism with the Real outside the Law, Miller takes capitalism as its own ideology, ignoring Lacan who saw clearly the antagonism masked by capitalist perversion. The vision of today's society as a capitalist Real outside symbolic law is a disavowal of antagonism, in exactly the same way that the notion of the sexual Real outside the Law is a disavowal of sexual antagonism.

Miller's obsession with the Real outside the Law also leads him to endorse all too quickly the thesis that, in our social reality, the virtual big Other is progressively replaced by the digital reality. Does the digital big Other simply fill in the gap of the disappearing virtual big Other? Some Lacanians (Miller included) often advocate the idea that today, in the era of "fake news," the big Other really no longer exists – but is this true? What if it exists more than ever, just in a new form? Our big Other is no longer the public space clearly distinguished from the obscenities of private exchanges, but the very *public* domain in which "fake news" circulates, in which we exchange rumors and conspiracy theories.<sup>30</sup> One should not lose sight of what is so surprising about the rise of the shameless obscenity of the alt-right so well noted and analyzed by Angela Nagle.<sup>31</sup> Traditionally (or in our retroactive view of tradition, at least), shameless obscenity worked as subversive, as an undermining of traditional domination, as depriving the Master of his false dignity. What we are getting today, with the exploding public obscenity, is not the disappearance of domination, of Master figures, but its forceful reappearance.

Donald Trump is the emblematic figure of this new type of obscene populist Master, and the usual argumentation against him – that his populism (concern for the well-being of the poor ordinary people) is a fake, that his actual politics protects the interests of the rich – is all

too shortsighted. The followers of Trump do not act “irrationally,” they are not victims of primitive ideological manipulations which make them vote against their interests, they are quite rational in their own terms: they vote for Trump because in the “patriotic” vision he is selling, he also addresses their ordinary everyday problems – safety, permanent employment, etc.<sup>32</sup> Trump is not winning just by shamelessly bombarding us with messages that generate obscene enjoyment at how he dares to violate the elementary norms of decency. Through all his shocking vulgarities, he is providing his followers with a narrative which makes sense – a very limited and twisted sense, but nonetheless a sense which obviously does a better job than the left-liberal narrative. His shameless obscenities serve as signs of solidarity with so-called ordinary people (“you see, I am the same as you, we are all red under our skin”), and this solidarity also signals the point at which Trump’s obscenity reaches its limit. Trump is not thoroughly obscene: when he talks about the greatness of America, when he dismisses his opponents as enemies of the people, etc., he intends to be taken seriously, and his obscenities are meant to precisely emphasize by contrast the level at which he is serious: they are meant to function as an obscene display of his belief in the greatness of America. Ralph Peters even went so far as to characterize this aspect of Trump’s appeal to ordinary voters in Hegelian terms of the dialectic of recognition – Trump’s message to the electorate ignored by the political establishment is one of recognition:

Donald Trump possessed the genius to grasp the craving for recognition in a huge swathe of the electorate ignored or actively insulted by the (previously) reigning political parties. Dismissed by the custodians of wealth; badgered by the politically correct; and taken for granted by those who make our laws; forgotten millions were ripe for Trump’s message – which reduces neatly to “*You matter!*”<sup>33</sup>

One cannot miss the irony of this fact: after Fukuyama presented Hegel as the philosopher of the “end of history” achieved in the liberal-democratic capitalism as the best possible social and political form, we get now Trump, the one who disturbed this vision of the end

of history and enacted a kind of reawakening of history (history in the sense of violent populist struggles and even of ideological civil war, at least), again as a kind of Hegelian ... This is why, in order to undermine Trump, one should begin by displacing the site of his obscenity and treat as truly obscene precisely his “serious” statements. Trump is not truly obscene when he uses vulgar, sexist etc. terms, he is truly obscene when he talks about America as the greatest country in the world, when he imposes his economic measures, etc. The obscenity of his speech masks this more basic obscenity. Once again, we could paraphrase here the well-known Marx Brothers dictum: Trump acts and looks as a shamelessly obscene politician, but this should not deceive us – he really is a shamelessly obscene politician.

Such an obscene big Other thus constitutes a third domain between the private and the public space: the private space elevated into the public sphere. It seems to be the form that best fits our immersion in cyberspace, our participation in all possible chatrooms, tweeting, instagramming, facebooking ... no wonder Trump makes most of his decisions public through twitter. However, we don’t get here the “real Trump”: the domain of public obscenities is not that of sharing intimate experiences, it is a public domain full of lies, hypocrisies and pure malevolence, a domain in which we engage in a way similar to that of wearing a disgusting mask. The standard relationship between my intimacy and the big Other of public dignity is thus turned around: obscenities are no longer limited to private exchanges, they explode in the public domain itself, allowing me to dwell in the illusion that it’s all just an obscene game while I remain innocent in my intimate purity.

But what happens to this obscene big Other (still a virtual-symbolic space) when we get immersed in a Singularity in which intimate fantasies are directly co-experienced? One thing is sure: the impact of the (eventual) rise of Singularity will be apocalyptic – the question is just: what kind of apocalypse will it trigger?

## **A Treatise on Digital Apocalypse**

Apocalypse (“uncovering” in Ancient Greek) is a disclosure or revelation of knowledge; in religious speech, what apocalypse discloses is something hidden, the ultimate truth we are blind to in our ordinary lives. “The Book of Revelation” depicts apocalypse as the complete and final destruction of the world; in the same vein, today we commonly refer to any larger-scale catastrophic event or chain of detrimental events to humanity or nature as “apocalyptic.” Although it is easy to imagine the apocalypse-disclosure without the apocalypse-catastrophe (say, a religious revelation) and the apocalypse-catastrophe without the apocalypse-disclosure (say, an earthquake destroying an entire continent), there is an inner link between the two dimensions: when we (think that we) confront some higher and hitherto hidden truth, this truth is so different from our common opinions that it has to shatter our world, and vice versa, every catastrophic event, even if purely natural, reveals something ignored in our normal existence, brings us face to face with an oppressed truth. In our customary daily lives, we are not ready to confront the ultimate truth and prefer to dwell in illusions, so that when we are compelled to face the truth, we experience it as “apocalyptic,” as the end of our world. Imagine we were to stumble upon an irrefutable proof that we are observed by aliens – no big catastrophe, just a tiny object discovered by chance. The impact of such a discovery with no material consequences for our daily lives would nonetheless seem apocalyptic, shattering the basic premises of our feeling of sovereignty and freedom, making ridiculous most of our spiritual assumptions.

### **Apocalypse With or Without a Kingdom?**

In his essay “Apocalypse without Kingdom,” Günther Anders introduced the concept of *naked apocalypse*: “the apocalypse that

consists of mere downfall, which doesn't represent the opening of a new, positive state of affairs (of the 'kingdom')." <sup>1</sup> Anders's idea was that a nuclear catastrophe would be precisely such a naked apocalypse: no new kingdom will arise out of it, just the obliteration of ourselves and our world. Our question here is: what will our entry into Singularity be? The entrance into a new higher (post-human) kingdom, just the disappearance of humanity the way we know it, or in some sense (but what sense?) both at the same time? It is clear that the eventual rise of Singularity will be apocalyptic in the complex meaning of the term: it will imply the encounter with a truth hidden in our ordinary human existence, i.e., the entrance into a new post-human dimension, which cannot but be experienced as catastrophic, as the end of our world. But will we still be here to experience our immersion in Singularity in any human sense of the term?

A more general overview of how an apocalypse functions is needed here; the best version of the paradoxes of apocalyptic reason is provided by Jean-Pierre Dupuy. <sup>2</sup> Apropos the threat of nuclear self-destruction of humanity, Dupuy points out its paradox: it is "an event which, if it were to occur, would make it not only that this history no longer has any sense but that it never had any sense since there would not be anyone to remember it." <sup>3</sup> Could we not say the same about Singularity (if we endorse its "pessimistic" reading)? Would it not be that, in an effectively post-human era in which our distance from external reality gets lost, our spiritual inheritance becomes meaningless, as if it doesn't exist and, consequently, as if it never existed. This is the question we should focus on: will post-human Singularity be a "higher stage" of perfection where we, post-humans, will (fondly) remember the vagaries of the "lower stage" of humanity, or will humanity retroactively become senseless?

Nothing makes the paradox of nuclear war clearer than the notion of the so-called "preemptive strike," a nuclear attack on the enemy carried out in order to prevent its attack on us. It is like a punishment executed in advance, before the criminal commits his crime, so that even if we strike first, our act counts as second, as a reaction, "striking second first." <sup>4</sup> The basic paradox of the MAD ("mutually assured destruction") logic of dissuasion (if both sides have enough



nuclear arms to destroy the other even if the other attacks first, then no side will attack first, knowing well that its attack will lead to its self-destruction) is that if it works perfectly it cancels itself, so that it is its very imperfection (the threat that it will not work, that one side will nonetheless trigger the bomb attack) that makes it operative. Dupuy thus demonstrates in detail how the argumentation about nuclear dissuasion necessarily gets caught in an antinomy of moral reason:

There is no unanimous reply to the question: “Is nuclear dissuasion efficient?”; there is no argument which does not give arms to the contrary argument; there is no reasoning which does not assume the form of a paradox. We have here a frustrating situation, almost a humiliation of reason.<sup>5</sup>

The Kantian echoes of this formulation are unmissable – apropos his antinomies of pure reason, Kant himself talks about the “euthanasia of reason.” While Kant limits these antinomies to the epistemological domain, we should be here more Kantian than Kant himself and about the antinomies of pure practical (ethical) reason. The paradoxes implied by the MAD reasoning are not traces of irrationality in this reasoning, proofs that we remain caught in the domain of irrational passions of revenge, resentment, etc., so that this reasoning is not really purely rational. On the contrary, these paradoxes are paradoxes, “irrationalities,” of pure logic and strategic reasoning itself, paradoxes which necessarily emerge when the stakes are raised so high (the disappearance of humanity). In Lacan’s terms of the logic of non-all, we have to pass from “irrationality” in the sense of the exception to reason (“pathological” passions which continue to distort its pure exercise) to the “irrationality” of pure reasoning itself.

The root of these paradoxes is that we are not dealing here with the ordinary time of historical progress but with what Dupuy calls the “time of the project” whose exemplary case is the great prophetic tradition of doomsayers who paint the dark future of total catastrophe as our destiny precisely to mobilize us to work to avoid – or at least postpone – it. Do today’s dark prophets of ecological catastrophe not act in exactly the same way? They paint the future fixed point of the ecological breakdown in order to mobilize us to act quickly and



decisively. The twentieth-century “determinist” Communists acted in a similar way, although their fixed point (Communist society) was a positive one, not a catastrophe to be avoided: Communism is necessary but we have to fight for it continuously, we are fundamentally responsible for it since our mistakes or opportunistic behavior may prevent the realization of historical necessity. In some versions of Western Marxism, the “fixed point” becomes negative, a catastrophic telos of history to be avoided; its name is for Adorno and Horkheimer “administered world/*verwaltete Welt*” and for Marcuse “one-dimensional society.” The beauty of this vision is that the negative “fixed point” is not a catastrophic turn of our societies but something that we are sliding into if, precisely, there will be *no* catastrophic turn and things will just go on (more or less) smoothly. Our destiny is the technocratic end-point towards which history tends, the final station of the (in)famous “train of history,” and what we should do, as Benjamin put it, is not foster historical progress but to pull the emergency brake of the train of history. For anti-Communists, the Communist project is, of course, a catastrophic endpoint, and its evocation a way to mobilize people to fight against it. They were very successful at this in the final decades of the Cold War: the many panicked proclamations that the Cold War was over, that Communism had already won, and this evocation of Communism as our destiny worked perfectly, as the defeat of Communism demonstrates. That’s why, while in accord with the basic thrust of MacGowan’s reading of the relationship between Hegel and Freud, I cannot agree with his disqualification of a key statement by Hegel as “misleading”:

If Hegel had access to Freud’s conception of the unconscious and the drives, he would have been able to formulate the appeal of contradiction more straightforwardly to both himself and his readers. He wouldn’t have used the misleading terms of the good and unity to describe the subject’s actions. He wouldn’t have said, near the end of the Encyclopedic Logic, “The good, the absolute good, brings itself to completion in the world eternally, and the result is that it is already brought to completion in and for itself, without needing first to wait for us.” Hegel has no conceptual

apparatus to formulate how we seek out disturbances in the guise of success.<sup>6</sup>

Hegel not only knows how to “seek out disturbances in the guise of success,” the problem is that he is ambiguous in how he formulates it. He can be read as asserting that the Absolute is playing with itself: it creates a disturbance (alienates itself from itself, gets involved in a struggle with itself), and enjoys playing with itself. The whole life of the Absolute is to “seek out disturbances,” and Hegel knows very well that every success creates a new (self-)division: when the enemy is defeated, the victor has to confront its own inconsistency ... What is wrong in this reading is the presupposition of the same subject of the process: the self-identical “Absolute” which plays a game with itself. What gets lost here is the key fact that there is no self-identical subject which plays with itself in divisions: division comes first, it precedes what is divided, and self-identity which emerges in the course of the process is a form of (self-)division. Without this fact, we cannot properly understand the quoted passage from Hegel that MacGowan dismisses as problematic. To put it in MacGowan’s terms, if reconciliation is reconciliation with contradiction, this means precisely that, in some sense, reconciliation always-already happened – the illusion is that reconciliation has not already happened. This is what Hegel says in the quoted “problematic” passage, but here interpretive problems begin. If we read this passage in a simple and direct way, it amounts to the strongest possible assertion of the Absolute as a self-sufficient Substance and not also a subject. In contrast to this reading, one should insist that the “problematic” passage is the only way to consistently formulate the idea of the Absolute not only as substance but also as subject. The solution is not to conceive the historical process as open, with everything depending on us, free subjects, and every objective determination a reified objectivization of our own creativity; it is also not a “balanced” combination of substantial fate and the limited space of free subjective creativity, in the sense of the famous lines from the beginning of Marx’s 18th Brumaire: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under

circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>7</sup> It is not that historical necessity provided the basic frame within which we can act freely (in the sense of Engels’s notion of historical necessity which realizes itself through a complex network of individual contingencies). There is Fate, our future is predetermined, the Absolute “is already brought to completion in and for itself, without needing first to wait for us,” but this very completion is our own contingent act.

In short, the paradox is that the only way to assert the possibility of a radical change through subjective intervention is to accept predestination and fate. Historical process is thus characterized by the overlapping of necessity and contingency, the overlapping which was first explicitly formulated in the Protestant idea of predestination. It’s not that a deeper necessity realizes itself through a complex set of contingent circumstances, it’s that contingent circumstances decide the fate of necessity itself: once a thing (contingently) happens, its occurrence retroactively becomes necessary. Our fate is not yet decided – not in the simple sense that we have a choice, but in a more radical sense of choosing one’s fate itself. It is also easy to see why, even if I accept that my acts are fully predetermined, so that my free will is an illusion, it is still rational to struggle with myself to do what I consider to be the right thing: my acts may be totally predetermined but I don’t know in what way, so what if I am also predetermined to passionately engage in ethical struggles with myself? This, of course, opens up a paradoxical possibility that, perhaps, the only way to break out of predetermined fate is to do nothing actively, to abstain from all struggle and totally surrender to fate.<sup>8</sup>

According to the standard view, the past is fixed, what happened happened, it cannot be undone, and the future is open, it depends on unpredictable contingencies. What we should propose here is a reversal of this standard view: the past is open to retroactive reinterpretations, while the future is closed since we live in a determinist universe. This doesn’t mean that we cannot change the future; it just means that, in order to change our future we should first (not “understand” but) change our past, reinterpret it in such a way that opens up towards a different future from the one implied by the

predominant vision of the past. Will there be another world war? The answer can only be a paradoxical one: *if* there is to be another war, it will be a necessary one. This is how history works – through weird reversals described by Dupuy: “if an outstanding event takes place, a catastrophe, for example, it could not not have taken place; nonetheless, insofar as it did not take place, it is not inevitable. It is thus the event’s actualization – the fact that it takes place – which retroactively creates its necessity.”<sup>9</sup> With regard to a new global war: once the conflict explodes (between US and Iran, between China and Taiwan ...), it will appear necessary, that is to say, we will automatically read the past that led to it as a series of causes that necessarily caused the explosion. If it does not happen, we will read it the way we read the Cold War today: as a series of dangerous moments where the catastrophe was avoided because both sides were aware of the deadly consequences of a global conflict. (So we have today many interpreters who claim that there never was any actual danger of a Third World War in the Cold War; that both sides were just playing with fire.) In the time of the project, counterfactuality thus plays a key role:

The future is taken as counterfactually independent from the past (although at the same time it depends or can depend on the past causally); the past is taken as counterfactually depending on the future (although it necessarily does not depend on it causally). The future is fixed, the past is open.<sup>10</sup>

How, precisely, can the past be changed counterfactually? Here, differentiality enters again. Recall our example from *Ninotchka*: we cannot change the content of a past cup of plain coffee, but we can change its differential status from “coffee without cream” to “coffee without milk.” This mediation of every positive existence is the stuff of “spirit,” of its negativity threatened by the prospect of Singularity. So, in the same way, with the rise of post-humanity, does humanity become immanently a “not-yet-Singularity”? One should be precise here: “what one anticipates as the fixed point in the future is the future which will realize itself if one did not anticipate it, or if one did not react to its anticipation the way we reacted to it trying to prevent

it.”<sup>11</sup> The contrast is clear here with the case of Oedipus in which the future (the destiny foretold to Oedipus’s father) realizes itself through the very fact that it was anticipated (told to the father) and that the father reacted to this by way of trying to avoid it (leaving the young Oedipus in a forest, expecting that he will die there) – without its anticipation, fate would not actualize itself.

To recapitulate, if, in the traditional view, the past is determined and the future open (depending on our choice), what characterizes the future is a disjunction: the future will be A or B, depending on our (free, not predetermined) choice. In the “time of the project,” there are no alternative futures because the future is necessary; however, by changing the past we can nonetheless constitute a different necessity and thus bring about a *different* future, the two (or more) options are here not bifurcated but superposed, like different states in quantum physics. This temporality thus enables us to assert “the indeterminacy of the future in a conception of time which makes the future a necessary one”:<sup>12</sup>

Insofar as the future is not rendered present, one has to think it as simultaneously inclusive of the catastrophic event and of its not-taking-place – not as disjunctive possibilities but as a conjunction of states one or the other of which will reveal itself a posteriori as necessary the moment the present will choose it.<sup>13</sup>

While, back in the years of the Cold War, the prospect of an apocalypse was almost exclusively focused on the possibility of global nuclear war, today there are many versions of an apocalyptic event that haunt us: nuclear war again (such as the US versus Iran or North Korea), but also the prospect of a global ecological catastrophe and the prospect of humanity’s passage into a post-human Singularity. (At least two other apocalyptic events are also easily imaginable: a financial-economic meltdown, or a digital apocalypse, i.e., the collapse of the digital network that regulates and sustains our lives.)

According to the memoirs of Oriani-Ambrosini, Cyril Ramaphosa, in the early 1990s the president of South Africa, drew a comparison between boiling a frog and how the new ANC government should

treat the white minority: “In his brutal honesty, Ramaphosa told me of the ANC’s 25-year strategy to deal with the whites: it would be like boiling a frog alive, which is done by raising the temperature very slowly. Being cold-blooded, the frog does not notice the slow temperature increase, but if the temperature is raised suddenly, the frog will jump out of the water. He meant that the black majority would pass laws transferring wealth, land, and economic power from white to black slowly and incrementally, until the whites lost all they had gained in South Africa, but without taking too much from them at any given time to cause them to rebel or fight.”<sup>14</sup> True or not, does this (rather unfortunate) metaphor not render perfectly our experience of being quite literally boiled in the process of global warming? Furthermore, there is a clear parallel in how (until now and in the developed countries) we experience the ecological threat and the threat of total digital control: in both cases, changes are gradual, so that, except for brief emergencies, we are able to ignore the effects in our daily lives ... until, all of a sudden, we will realize that it is too late and that we have lost it all.<sup>15</sup>

The “fixed point” in the future around which the time of the project executes its circular movement (counterfactually changing the past and thereby the causality that will – or will not – generate the apocalypse) can assume different forms of (non)desirability. In the logic of MAD and doomsday prophecies, as well as in ecological doomsday discourse, it is a negative one (we fix on it in order to postpone/avoid it);<sup>16</sup> in Communism it is a positive one (we evoke it to struggle for it), while Singularity as a fixed point is open, indeterminate, divided – it can be positive or negative in many ways. This is why superposition of alternate states of the necessary future is at its extreme here: the arrival of some kind of post-humanity is generally accepted as a fact, nobody (with the rare exception of those who plead for a Dune-like collective decision to destroy mind-machines) perceives it as something we should be totally opposed to. Consequently, what are superposed here are not the two states of apocalypse arriving or not arriving, but a multitude of versions of how the apocalypse itself will look: a collective religious bliss, the rise of *homo deus* (an individual with much greater capabilities), the



disappearance of human spirituality, or ... let us reiterate our crucial question: how will the (putative) rise of neuralink affect this paradoxical temporal structure of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*? Or, more precisely, how does the rise of neuralink appear from the Hegelian standpoint? What is it, if it is (clearly) not the *Aufhebung* of our humanity, its elevation to a higher level? Furthermore, not only does neuralink not function as an *Aufhebung* of our humanity, as its elevation on a higher divine-like level; its novelty resides in the fact that it eliminates the very (symbolic) space in which *Aufhebung* can operate ... Is, then, the Hegelian logic of contradiction still at work here, and if yes, in what form? How does the Hegelian contradiction work?

In the act of grasping the symbolic structure absolutely, as an ultimate horizon for thought, we can illuminate the contradiction that marks the point of the structure's internal vulnerability. This at once creates the possibility for change and indicates that no change, no matter how revolutionary, will ever heal the wound of the social order. A society can move beyond a specific contradiction, but it will necessarily encounter another one. This is not a recipe for quietism but a call to act. The point of political contestation is to move in the direction of an increasingly resistant contradiction, and philosophy plays a vital role in this movement. This is Hegel's definition of progress: the movement from more easily resolved social contradictions to more intractable ones.<sup>[17](#)</sup>

How to reply here to the obvious reaction: why is the fact that when we overcome one contradiction we necessarily encounter another one "not a recipe for quietism but a call to act"? *Vulgari eloquentia*, if, by flushing the toilet in order to get rid of one contradiction, you get the same shit (or, *Bulgari eloquentia*, you get *sŭshtoto laĭno*) back in an even more intractable form, why fight at all? Why not remain within the old contradiction (say, capitalism), just trying to render it a little bit more bearable? To put it in a slightly different way, it is too easy to claim that reconciliation means reconciliation with contradiction, and that all evil comes from avoiding contradictions, i.e., to turn around the standard perspective and claim that totalitarianism comes from trying to leave contradictions behind.<sup>[18](#)</sup>

One should be more specific here: “progress” is the move from (external) antagonism (us against the enemy) to immanent (self-)contradiction. So it’s not a Maoist celebration of eternal struggle with the enemy but an admission of the fact that, even after you (eventually) destroy your enemy, the new situation will continue to be a self-contradictory one. But it is even too much to say that the denial of self-contradiction generates the figure of the Enemy: Hitler was a true enemy, he had to be fought and destroyed, but it would be ridiculous to claim that the progressive forces fighting him were wrong to externalize their inner contradiction into the external figure of an Enemy.

### **Fall from the Fall**

This brings us to our final thesis: what eludes Singularity is another singularity – we might even say: singularity itself in its oppositional determination – namely the singularity of a pure Cartesian subject. Nothing escapes Singularity – nothing except this “nothing” itself, the void of the Cartesian subject. Subject and not a human person with all the wealth of its inner life – we should get rid of the illusion (into which we fall almost automatically) that, in Singularity, we will remain basically the same humans as we are now, communicating with others, sharing feelings, etc., just at some “higher” level. This illusion is clearly perceptible in most of the theorists of Singularity – Kurzweil, for example, doesn’t even notice how he automatically assumes that, even if we are immersed in Singularity, we continue to act like “free” responsible individuals. In short, the problem with the notion of Singularity is not that it is too “radical” or “utopian” but that it is not radical enough: it continues to locate the advent of Singularity in our common universe of intersubjectivity, i.e., it ignores how the eventual rise of Singularity will undermine the very basic presuppositions of our intersubjective universe. If we are to take seriously the idea that humanity is a failed passage to a higher stage, a thwarted progress, and that what we usually perceive as the indications of human greatness or creativity are precisely reactions to this fundamental failure, can we then imagine a stage which would be a humanity that somehow overcame its constitutive failure, a



humanity without sex and mortality? When the direct link of our brain with the digital network passes a certain threshold (a quite realist prospect), the gap that separates our self-awareness from external reality will collapse (since our thoughts will be able to directly affect external reality – and vice versa – plus will be in direct contact with other minds). One doesn't have to follow the conjectures of Kurzweil or the New Age fantasies like the last scene of Kubrick's *2001* to see that something new is effectively emerging here. It is impossible for us to predict its exact shape, but one thing is clear: we will no longer be singular mortal and sexed subjects. Will we lose our singularity (and with it our subjectivity) as well as our distance from "external" reality?

This brings us back to the topic of the constitutive role of limitation in being-human: since our – humanity's – "highest" achievements are rooted in our very ultimate limitations (failure, mortality, and the concomitant sexuality), i.e., in what we cannot but experience as the obstacle to our "higher" spiritual existence, the idea that this "higher" level can survive without the obstacle, without what prevents its full actualization, is an illusion that can be accounted for in terms of the paradox of *objet a*, a disturbing obstacle to perfection which engenders the very notion of perfection to which it serves as the obstacle, so that if we abolish the obstacle, we simultaneously lose what it is obstacle to. This paradox is operative at multiple levels, up to the feminine beauty. A voluptuous lady from Portugal once told me a wonderful anecdote: when her most recent lover had first seen her fully naked, he told her that, if she lost just one or two kilos, her body would be perfect. The truth was, of course, that had she lost those kilos, she would probably have looked more ordinary – the very element that seems to disturb perfection itself creates the illusion of the perfection it disturbs: if we take away the excessive element, we lose the perfection itself.

The crucial political example of this paradox is provided by Marx whose fundamental mistake was to conclude, from these insights, that a new, higher social order (Communism) is possible, an order that would not only maintain but even raise to a higher degree and effectively fully release the potential of the self-increasing spiral of productivity which, in capitalism, on account of its inherent

obstacle/contradiction, is again and again thwarted by socially destructive economic crises. In short, what Marx overlooked is that, to put it in standard Derridean terms, this inherent obstacle/antagonism as the “condition of impossibility” of the full deployment of the productive forces is simultaneously its “condition of possibility”: if we abolish the obstacle, the inherent contradiction of capitalism, we do not get the fully unleashed drive to productivity finally delivered of its impediment, but we lose precisely this productivity that seemed to be generated and simultaneously thwarted by capitalism – if we take away the obstacle, the very potential thwarted by this obstacle dissipates. (Therein would reside a possible Lacanian critique of Marx, focusing on the ambiguous overlapping between surplus value and surplus enjoyment.) So the critics of Communism were in a way right when they claimed that Marxian Communism is an impossible fantasy; what they did not perceive is that Marxian Communism, this notion of a society of pure unleashed productivity outside the frame of capital, was a fantasy inherent to capitalism itself, the capitalist inherent transgression at its purest, a strictly ideological fantasy of maintaining the thrust to productivity generated by capitalism, while getting rid of the “obstacles” and antagonisms that were – as the sad experience of the “really existing capitalism” demonstrates – the only possible framework of the effective material existence of a society of permanent self-enhancing productivity.

And, again, does exactly the same paradox not apply to the vision of posthuman Singularity? The eventual rise of post-humanity will not only compel us to grasp a new life form, it will also compel us to redefine what constitutes humanity itself – recall here again T.S. Eliot’s thesis that every really new work of art changes the entire past history of art. This redefinition will concern especially the role of obstacles: we will be compelled to accept that, in human life, finitude is constitutive of the very transcendence which emerges against its background.

Insofar as posthumanity is, from our finite/mortal human standpoint, in some sense the point of the Absolute towards which we strive, the zero-point at which the gap between thinking and acting disappears, the point at which I became *homo deus*, we

encounter here again the paradox of our brush with the Absolute: the Absolute persists as the virtual point of perfection in our finitude, as that X we always fail to reach, but when we get over the limitation of our finitude we also lose the Absolute itself. Something new will emerge, but it will not be creative spirituality relieved of mortality and sexuality – in this passage to the New, we will definitely lose both. (And sex is not just an example here: the convoluted space of *Aufhebung* is immanently sexualized.)<sup>19</sup>

And, incidentally, the eventual withdrawal of sex that will come with our entry into Singularity will just seal the process which already goes on with the progressive digitalization of our lives: statistics show that today's adolescents spend much less time with sexuality than with surfing the web and with drugs. Even if they engage in sex, is doing it in virtual space (with hard core pornography) not much easier and more instantly gratifying? For this reason, the new US TV series *Euphoria* (described in publicity as following “a group of high school students as they navigate drugs, sex, identity, trauma, social media, love and friendship”) is thus almost the opposite of the portrayal of the dissolute life of today's high school population. It is out of touch with today's young, weirdly anachronistic, more an exercise in the middle-age nostalgia for how depraved young generations once were.

The first lesson is therefore that we should reject the celebration of Singularity as the arrival of *homo deus* as well as its (almost) symmetrical opposite, the desperate claim that Singularity amounts to the end of humanity. (A Heideggerian would for certain insist that we are already lost: the catastrophe is not awaiting us, it has already happened, we renounced humanity the moment we even considered enacting Singularity – yet another example of the temporality in which, when something new is empirically emerging, it has already happened in its essential dimension, at the transcendental level. This is how Heidegger understands modern technology: the true danger does not reside in the possibility of our nuclear etc. self-destruction, it is already here when we relate to reality as an object of technological exploitation.)

The second lesson is that we also have to reject the premise that underlies the opposition between the two readings of the impact of

Singularity, celebratory and catastrophic. Both readings presume that, in Singularity, we effectively leave behind the symbolic domain of finitude/mortality/sexuality; their difference is that, for one, the new domain is a bliss of swimming in trans-individual awareness, and for the other, it is, for the very same reason, a catastrophic end of humanity. If we accept this premise, then the only way to maintain the ethical dimension is, as we have already seen, the Kantian one: to limit our knowledge. This is the point made forcefully by Greenblatt (quoted earlier): the urgency of moral choice works only if we are imperfect, if our knowledge is limited. Kant makes it easy because In-itself is by definition inaccessible to us: there is no choice for us here, the limitation of our knowledge is not our choice, i.e., we are never in the position of saying: "Now I can choose between transhuman (divine) knowledge and limited knowledge which keeps the space open for morality!" The choice was already made by our Creator.

If, however, with the prospect of Singularity, we (humanity) *do* have a choice – formally, at least, we could decide not to develop it – does this mean that if we choose Singularity, we necessarily (*eo ipso*) lose the ethical dimension: we lose it because we get too much knowledge? One has to be more precise here: the reason it seems that Singularity poses a threat to the ethical dimension is not the explosive growth of our knowledge as such but, much more, the plausibility that the immersion in Singularity will deprive us of our status of singular individuals acting alone (in the sense of autonomy).

Let's first deal with the question of limitation: it may appear that, when we are immersed in Singularity, we get rid of the obstacle constituted by our mortality and finitude, and we lose the excess generated by this obstacle. In other words, what is threatened by Singularity is the power, the positive function, of imperfection itself, even of straight ignorance. Hegel was fully aware of the positive function of forgetting: for him, forgetting is not a weakness but the expression of the Spirit's highest, "absolute," power – the absence of this power of forgetting (which is effectively a specific aspect of negativity) causes a debilitating indecision, as was made clear in Alexander Luria's classic *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, a short brilliant

study of the case of an individual who was not able to forget things. Although he made a living as a circus freak answering encyclopedic questions, his subjective life was a ruin since he was not able to make a simple decision (which involves a brutal simplification of a complex network of pros and contras). As a result, his entire life was organized as waiting – waiting for some big act or event which would happen in the near future (but which never effectively happened).<sup>20</sup> This notion of forgetting as not a weakness but a supreme power also explains the passage from the absolute Idea to Nature which is precisely the extreme point of forgetting, of self-negation.

As we have already seen, when they try to describe how our life will be in a Singularity, the partisans of Singularity as a rule show breathtaking naivety: they describe a subject who argues and communicates in the same way as we do, with the same worries and desires as us, just with his powers and cognitions multiplied – we will basically remain the same individuals, just that we will be far stronger and with a vastly wider scope of experiences. The question they never raise is: but what if our inner life, inclusive of our highest spiritual achievements, is rooted in our finite bodily existence and its limitations, so that, with the passage into Singularity, we are deprived of the basic features of our inner life? Konrad Lorenz made somewhere the ambiguous remark that we ourselves (the “actually existing” humanity) are the sought-after “missing link” between animal and man – how are we to read it? Of course, the first association that imposes itself here is the notion that the “actually existing” humanity still dwells in what Marx designated as “pre-history,” and that true human history will begin with the advent of Communist society; or, in Nietzsche’s terms, that man is just a bridge, a passage between animal and overman. (Not to mention the New Age version: we are entering a new era in which humanity will transform itself into a Global Mind, leaving behind petty individualism.) What Lorenz “meant” was undoubtedly situated along these lines, although with a more humanistic twist: humanity is still immature and barbarian, it has not yet reached full wisdom. However, an opposite reading also imposes itself: this intermediate status of man *is* his greatness, since the human being *is* in its very essence a “passage,” the finite openness into an abyss.<sup>21</sup>

The vision of a more perfect state of things which would overcome the limitations of our present situation is thus as a rule the projection into the future which remains grounded in our present situation – every image of “overman” is an illusory projection which only has sense from within the horizon of our human finitude. This does not mean that we cannot break out of the constraints of our finitude; it just means that, when and if we do it (say, with our immersion in Singularity), what we’ll get will not be an actual return to the life before the Fall, a return which would effectively undo the entire interregnum of the Fall, but a return from the Fall in which the trace of the Fall will persist. With Singularity, we’ll get a new Fall, a kind of Fall from the Fall: a much deeper Fall which will display the structure of the loss of a loss. In Hegelese, what if Singularity will work as a negation of negation: a negation which gets itself negated, not by way of reverting to a new higher positivity but by way of confronting us with a pure negation. We can read Hegel’s “negation of negation” qua self-relating negativity also in the sense of a position of utter despair when the subject not only assumes a radical loss, but is then deprived of this loss itself – not in the sense of regaining what was lost, but in the much more radical sense of finding itself in the radical void after losing the very coordinates which made the loss meaningful.

In Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, Scottie first experiences the loss of Madeleine, his fatal love; when he recreates Madeleine in Judy and then discovers that the Madeleine he knew already was Judy pretending to be Madeleine, what he discovers is not simply that Judy is a fake (he knew that she was not the true Madeleine, since he recreated a copy of Madeleine out of her), but that, because she is *not* a fake – she *is* Madeleine – Madeleine herself was already a fake – *objet a* disintegrates, the very loss is lost, we get a “negation of negation.” It is important to remember here that the last shot of *Vertigo* – after Judy falls from the tower, Scottie stands on the edge, looking down – gave rise to radically opposed readings: for some interpreters, this shot signals that Scottie survives as a totally broken man, for others, it is a kind of happy ending (Scottie is now cured from his disease, he can look down into the abyss) – the ambivalence which perfectly reproduces the ambiguity of the

outcome of the Hegelian negation of negation (utter despair or reconciliation). Scottie on the edge of the church tower, after experiencing the loss of a loss – the image of the subject caught in Singularity, deprived of its substance, suspended between hope and utter despair ...

This, then, is our hypothesis: Singularity will be such a loss of a loss which makes the loss absolute, not a simple disappearance of a loss, a return to new immediacy. That is to say, what if subjectivity cannot simply be undone, but persists in its negation in an even purer form? This is the crux of our argument for the survival of subject in the case of its immersion in singularity: the loss of a loss is not the restoration of the fullness prior to the loss but the absolute loss, and the status of the subject (as opposed to person) is that of such a loss. Let's return briefly to the topic of a productive obstacle or limitation: in Singularity (so we are told) the communication will be direct, without the detours which engender supplementary spiritual wealth – but what if, in such a situation, the lack will return in an even stronger form, as an absolute lack, the lack of detour itself? In other words, what if directly getting what we want desublimates what we get and thus renders it worthless?

The prospect opened up by neuralink is not just that of directly shared sexual experiences. Our “normal” experiences are rooted in body and language – but, what if we imagine a direct arousal of the pleasure neurons in our brain, so that we experience a “pure” orgasm stronger than those achieved through bodily interaction and language of seduction? What would this “pure” orgasm amount to? What if, far from offering the impossible/real full satisfaction, the subject would experience here what, to borrow Platonov's term, one is tempted to call absolute *toská*, the experience of the unbearable loss of mediation/detour: we get the desired thing itself, but without the network of mediations which makes it desirable? Such a reading points in the direction of *toská* as melancholy – recall that, for Freud, melancholy is defined by the gap between the object of our desire and the object-cause that makes us desire it: in melancholy, we have what we desired, but we no longer desire it. Such a structure of melancholy clearly implies a divided subject, a subject who (consciously) desires an object unaware of the (unconscious) object-

cause that makes him/her desire this object, so that when the object-cause of desire fails in its function, this subject experiences his/her situation as inconsistent, not really desiring what s/he desires.

This brings us back to our big question: how will the fact of a wired brain affect the dimension of what Freud called the Unconscious? The digital big Other which registers my acts and decisions can in some sense effectively be said to “know me better than myself”: in the example quoted by Harari (deciding on getting married),<sup>22</sup> the digital Other ignores my inner feelings and intentions and can thus identify better than myself where I really stand. Imagine a subject submitted to commodity fetishism: just by observing and registering my activity when I am engaged in commodity exchange, the big Other will see that, in contrast to my professed secular rationalism, I really believe in commodity fetishism, I act as if commodities are magical objects, etc. With BCI, the situation is (almost) inverted: registering my inner feelings and experience, the digital Other will identify me as a pragmatic rationalist – will it be able to register my unconscious fetishism (which determines how I act)? In other words, what happens here with the Freudo-Lacanian *divided* subject, with a subject split between its conscious self-experience and its unconscious beliefs and stances? Does the whole idea of neuralink, to put it brutally, not ignore the unconscious and reduce us to traditional self-conscious subjectivity? Let us return to the example of my ambiguous stance towards my father: consciously I hate him, I want to get rid of him, but this hatred covers up my unconscious love and attachment to him. And, as we have already seen, this other dimension is not present ready-made in the depth of my psyche as my true reality; it is a vague psychic thrust that insists and fully comes-to-be only in phenomena like transference. In the case of such a divided subject, we are not dealing here with two realities, the conscious one and the unconscious one: the unconscious is not my deeper reality but, as Lacan insists, a domain of the non-realized, of a purely virtual potentiality. The unconscious hatred of my father doesn’t mean that, deep in myself, I “really hate him.” It means that my public speech (of love) is disturbed by slips of the tongue and other symptomatic acts which indicate another dimension that resists the message of the public speech. So which stance will be registered



by the digital big Other? Again, does this not indicate that the wired brain as the direct sharing of experiences and conscious thoughts ignores the Unconscious?

This brings us to the ambiguous status of a mask: with every additional layer of the mediation of my communication with others, I am more and more able to interpose between me and my partners the mask I am wearing. Say, when I communicate with a potential sexual partner on the web, I of course present there a constructed image of myself which doesn't fit my reality. But this doesn't mean that I am simply lying, masking the truth about myself. What if there are dimensions of myself I am not ready to confront, and what if I am able to assume them only in the guise of a fiction, telling myself "we are just playing a game, this is not the real me"? A nice case of a "truth which has the structure of a fiction" (as Lacan put it) is the series of novels (or films) in which a play performed by characters (as part of the plot) mirrors the characters' real-life amorous entanglements, like the film about the staging of *Othello* in which the actor who plays Othello is effectively jealous and, when the play's final scene is performed, he really strangles the actress who plays Desdemona to death. Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (her least popular novel) provides an early example of this procedure. Fanny Price, a young girl from a poor family raised at Mansfield Park by Sir Thomas, grows up there with her four cousins, Tom, Edmund, Maria and Julia, but is treated as inferior to them; only Edmund shows her real kindness, and, over time, a tender love grows between the two. When the children have grown up, the stern patriarch Sir Thomas leaves for a year. During this time, the fashionable and worldly Henry Crawford and his sister Mary arrive in the village, and their arrival sparks a series of romantic entanglements. The young people decide to put on a play, *Lovers' Vows*; Edmund and Fanny both initially oppose the plan, believing Sir Thomas would disapprove. Edmund is eventually swayed, reluctantly agreeing to play the part of Anhalt, the lover of the character played by Mary Crawford, to prevent the others bringing an outsider in to take the role. As well as giving Mary and Edmund a vehicle to talk about love and marriage, the play provides a pretext for Henry and Maria to flirt in public ... But let us imagine a more brutal example: in my social reality I am a

weak coward, but in my online interactions I present myself as a cruel sadist and serial seducer. It is not enough to say that in this way I cover up my actual weakness – what if in my real interactions with others I suppress brutal tendencies which come out only in the universe of digital fictions? In this case, my screen persona is closer to the core of my being than my real-life persona ... Will the registration of my thoughts in a wired brain be able to distinguish between a mask which renders my true subjective position and a mask which is effectively just a mask concealing my true subjective stance?

Therein resides the ambiguity of the (rather obvious) difference between digital control and recording of our speech and activity, and wiring our brain where our inner stream of consciousness itself will be shared with others and/or a machine. It may appear that a wired brain exposes us much more: if all our acts and sayings are registered, we can still go on doing what we are doing and saying with fingers crossed and thus maintain the illusion that our inner life eludes digital control. However, if we are divided subjects (as psychoanalysis claims), i.e., if the innermost core of our being is not accessible to the stream of our consciousness, and if this repressed part nonetheless expresses itself in what we do or say without willing it (slips of the tongue, etc.), then, paradoxically, the registration of our external acts can reveal more about the core of our being than a direct insight into our mind – when we (think that we) wear a mask and merely play a role, there can be more truth in the mask than in what is beneath the mask.

It is crucial to bear in mind here that the gap between digital registration and control of our activity and direct neuralink reading of our thoughts cannot ever be abolished, the two sides cannot ever be united in the sense of providing a complete picture of the subject under control by way of combining external and internal data into a Whole. External data should be interpreted with regard to what they express, and how they express subject's inner life, but the inner life available through neuralink should also be interpreted in view of subject's "external" activity (did the subject really intend what he was thinking?). It is impossible to square this circle because a third element is missing: the virtual presence of absentials implied by both

other levels, absentials found neither in external reality nor in our inner life of self-awareness. We are here back at the paradoxical status of the Unconscious as the third virtual domain which is neither the inner flow of my self-awareness (captured by neuralink), nor the reality of my acts (captured by external digital control of my activity).

To return to *Genesis*, the voice of Singularity is another address by the snake; it promises the annulment of the Fall and the achievement of immortality and superior knowledge if we eat its fruit, i.e., if we immerse ourselves in it. As in *Genesis*, we should be aware that the choice is here a forced one: we cannot but do it, no withdrawal is possible. So what will happen? Definitely not what the proponents of Singularity expect. Like the serpent, they are not lying, and the threat resides precisely in their not lying. One can only say that first, there will be some kind of catastrophe, and then, through a repetition, something new may emerge.

With regard to the catastrophe, we've already mentioned the prospect of a direct arousal of the pleasure neurons in our brain, so that we experience a "pure" orgasm stronger than those achieved through bodily interaction and language of seduction. But what of the opposite option: new forms of "pure" pain and suffering? Metzinger made the same point already apropos the "ordinary" human consciousness; "it is not at all clear if the biological form of consciousness, as so far brought about by evolution on our planet, is a desirable form of experience, an actual good in itself."<sup>23</sup> This problematic feature concerns conscious pain and suffering: evolution "has created an expanding ocean of suffering and confusion where previously there was none. As not only the simple number of individual conscious subjects but also the dimensionality of their phenomenal state spaces is continuously increasing, this ocean is also deepening."<sup>24</sup> And it is reasonable to expect that new artificially generated forms of awareness will create new "deeper" forms of suffering ... As we have already seen, because of all these reasons, for all those who see in neuralink a threat to our being-human, the only way out would be to opt for the Dune solution. In Herbert's classic sci-fi novel, humanity becomes dominated by advanced computers and collectively decides to destroy all "thinking machines," adapting their minds to be capable of extremely complex

tasks. (This mental development is nonetheless enabled by the use of spice mélange which improves health, extends life, enables travel in space beyond the velocity of light, and can even bestow limited prescience.) But, as we have already seen, it is too late for this option – who knows how far secret services and corporations have already progressed in the direction of realizing different versions of neuralink and direct control of our minds?

### [The Libidinal Economy of Singularity](#)

Here we should return to Miller's reference to Mao: yes, the obscene big Other signals the fact that "there is a great disorder in the real" – but, as we all know, Mao's saying goes on: "... so the situation is excellent." So where is this other dimension absent from Miller's reading of the capitalist real? Where is the opening ("hope") for a radical transformation? Back to Beckett: to begin discerning this opening, we should locate the mode of erratic-hallucinatory experience as one of the two sides of a fractured social totality, as the subjective aspect (selfless ego) whose objective counterpart is the structure of global capitalism. And the same holds for Singularity: as Miller himself indicates when he writes that "capitalism and science combine to make nature disappear," the eventual rise of Singularity (the ultimate "disappearance of nature" that we can imagine today) will not be only a subjective-cosmic phenomenon, but also a phenomenon grounded in a combination of science and capitalism – science and the technology which will give rise to it is not neutral but is grounded in capitalist relations. In other words, the eventual rise of Singularity will be a case of what we cannot but call post-human capitalism. Usually it is posited that capitalism is (more) historical and our humanity, inclusive of sexual difference, more basic, even ahistorical; however, what we are witnessing today is nothing less than an essay to integrate the passage to post-humanity into capitalism – this is what the efforts of new billionaire gurus like Elon Musk are about. Their prediction that capitalism "as we know it" is coming to an end refers to "human" capitalism, and the passage they talk about is the passage from "human" to post-human capitalism.

Singularity thus confronts us with a problem: how will the emerging “post-human” capitalism work? And, insofar as capitalism implies workers’ exploitation, how will it continue to exploit us? In order to unravel this problem, one has to introduce the dimension of enjoyment into our consideration of Singularity. From the libidinal standpoint, is Singularity not the space of an ecstatic trance of intense enjoyment, a space in which we can fully enjoy, no longer hindered by the constraints of our finitude? So where does libidinal exploitation enter here? To simplify it to the utmost, it takes place when the Other (the system that exploits us) appropriates our (its subjects’) enjoyments, when we are serving and feeding the “enjoyment of the system (this is what exploitation ultimately stands for from the Freudo-Lacanian perspective)”<sup>25</sup> (247).

To properly understand this claim, it is crucial to go beyond the mere parallel between labor of enjoyment and labor of the commodity production, between producing surplus-enjoyment and producing surplus-value: the relationship between the two is not just that of a formal homology, the two are moments of the same totality, which means that their relationship is that of a mutual implication – each is in its way a moment of the other. So we have enjoyment of labor (enjoyment in hard work itself which implies renunciation of enjoyment) and labor of enjoyment (enjoyment itself is not just a passive experience, it is the outcome of labor).

The first thing to note is that economic exploitation (the production of surplus-value) only functions if it is sustained by the enjoyment of those exploited: “the master’s discourse does not hide what it is or what it wants. What does remain hidden is the link between exploitation and enjoyment, the reproduction of the relations of domination by means of the production of enjoyment”(15). In short, a master can exert his domination only if he “bribes” the servant by way of throwing him some crumbs of enjoyment. This enjoyment has two opposed main forms: I directly enjoy the very subordination to the Master whom I serve. This subordination provides a kind of security and meaning to my life; the Master who controls me discreetly allows me to violate his prohibitions when I am out of his view, knowing that such small transgressions will keep me satisfied (therein resided the role of political jokes in Communist regimes).

This brings us back to Lacan's critical reading of Hegel's dialectic of master and servant where Lacan points out that it is the servant, not the master, who enjoys:

The work, Hegel tells us, to which the slave submits in giving up jouissance out of fear of death, is precisely the path by which he achieves freedom. There can be no more obvious lure than this, politically or psychologically. Jouissance comes easily to the slave, and it leaves work in serfdom.<sup>[26](#)</sup>

Maybe, from this standpoint, we should reread the famous lines from Hegel's *Phenomenology* about the interrelation between desire, *Begierde*, enjoyment, *Genuss*, and labor, *Arbeit*:

Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object, and, as a result, it has reserved to itself that unmixed feeling for its own self. However, for that reason, this satisfaction is itself only a vanishing, for it lacks the objective aspect, or stable existence. In contrast, work is desire held in check, it is vanishing staved off, or: work cultivates and educates. *Die Arbeit hingegen ist gehemmte Begierde, aufgehaltenes Verschwinden, oder sie bildet.* The negative relation to the object becomes the form of the object; it becomes something that endures because it is just for the laborer himself that the object has self-sufficiency. This negative mediating middle, this formative doing, is at the same time singularity, or the pure being-for itself of consciousness, which in the work external to it now enters into the element of lasting. Thus, by those means, the working consciousness comes to an intuition of self-sufficient being as its own self.<sup>[27](#)</sup>

We should give a Lacanian twist to the claim that “work is desire held in check”: *gehemmt* also means “inhibited, impeded, obstructed,” and we should give to these terms all their Freudian weight, especially with regard to the reversal of repression of desire into desire for repression – what if this impediment/postponement of enjoyment generates a surplus of enjoyment on its own? Marx's “labor theory of value” displays an unexpected homology with the key ingredient of Freud's theory, the “labor theory of the

unconscious”:<sup>28</sup> the unconscious “value” of a dream is exclusively the product of “dream-work,” not of the dream-thoughts on which dream-work exercises its transformative activity, in the same way that the value of a commodity is the product of the work spent on it. The paradox is here that it is the very cyphering (obfuscation) of the dream-thought, its translation into the dream texture, that engenders the properly unconscious content of a dream. Freud emphasizes that the true secret of the dream is not its content (the “dream-thoughts”), but the form itself: the dream-work is not merely a process of masking the dream’s “true message”; the dream’s true core, its unconscious wish, inscribes itself only through this process of masking, so that the moment we retranslate the dream-content back into the dream-thought expressed in it, we lose the “true motive force” of the dream – in short, it is the process of masking itself which inscribes into the dream its true secret. This is the core mechanism of the “labour theory of enjoyment”: surplus-enjoyment is produced by repression itself, by encoding the dream-thought into the manifest dream – or, to put it more directly, renunciation of pleasure turns into (surplus-)pleasure of renunciation. Even when we hate to indulge in pleasures, we get caught in the trap of finding pleasure in the activity of hating itself. Is this not the case with stern moralists whose pleasure is palpable when they give voice to their horror at our decadent pleasures? There are three steps in this process: first, there is some form of direct pleasure; then, we are forced to renounce this direct pleasure; finally, this very labor of renunciation, of repression, generates a surplus-pleasure of its own – the condensed formula of this process is P-L-P, i.e., pleasure – labor of repression – surplus pleasure (a formula which, of course, echoes Marx’s formula of the circulation of capital: M-C-M (money, commodity, surplus-money). Imagine the simple example of compulsive rituals: a compulsive (obsessional) neurotic finds some of his desires intolerable, he fights them, so he establishes rituals of self-punishment by means of which he tries to keep his intolerable desires at bay, but then he starts to enjoy these rituals themselves ... I fight my sinful sexual desires by painfully whipping myself, but then I start to enjoy self-flagellation itself because, in a negative form, it reminds me that the prohibited desires are still active in me.



So, again, how does exploitation enter here? In terms of libidinal economy, the way to do it is to mobilize the distinction between drive and desire. The desire (or, rather, drive) of capitalism itself is not the capitalist's desire – the latter can vary in all its pathological declinations, it can be the desire to take revenge, to amass wealth, to expand construction and produce more, or whatsoever, while the desire of capitalism itself is a monotonous drive towards expanded reproduction. (And why should we not also add Communism, i.e., the distinction between the desire of a Communist and the desire of Communism itself?) In order to avoid a new kind of animism (of desires inhabiting objective social processes), one should nonetheless inquire into the more precise status of this non-subjectivized desire: although non-subjective, it still functions as something that presupposes subjectivity (since it only functions as presupposed by it). This is why it is not enough to focus on the private vices of individual capitalists: the best servants of capital may well be those who ignore their private vices and are totally dedicated to the “higher loyalty” of the smooth circulation of capital. Homologous to this distinction is that between the private desires of individual state functionaries and the “desire” embodied in the functioning of state apparatuses. The campaign against Trump and for his impeachment tells a lot about our politico-ideological predicament. Trump is portrayed as an individual pursuing his own private interests, not as the representative of a state and its apparatuses. Edward Snowden immediately got this point, commenting that

a whistleblower's complaint, which triggered US President Donald Trump's impeachment inquiry, is strategically “quite wise” in its focus on the president versus an institution ... Congress could be more than happy to throw an individual abusing their office under the bus, in a way that they are not willing to do when they themselves are implicated by the same allegations.... This whistleblower is doing something [that's] a little bit unusual. They're alleging that an individual is breaking the law who, of course, is the president, [who] is historically unpopular at this moment.<sup>[29](#)</sup>



It is thus acceptable to criticize an individual who breaks the law while he pursues his interests or private pathological inclinations (revenge, lust for power and glory ...), but it is much more difficult to discern a crime in the activity of a state institution, a criminal activity which is performed by personally honest individuals dedicated to their job – evil and crime are here not individualized, but inscribed into the very functioning of the institution.

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's much celebrated *Lives of Others* (2006) falls into the same trap: as is the case with many depictions of the harshness of Communist regimes, the film misses the true horror of the situation in its very attempt to portray it. How? What sets in motion the film's plot is the corrupt minister of culture who wants to get rid of the top GDR playwright, Georg Dreyman, so that he will be able to pursue unimpeded his affair with Dreyman's partner, the actress Christa-Maria. In this way, the horror inscribed into the very formal structure of the system is relegated to an effect of a personal whim – the point lost is that without the minister's personal corruption, with only dedicated and devoted bureaucrats, the system would be no less terrifying. In the real German Democratic Republic, a writer like Dreyman, famous and published also in the West, would have been under constant surveillance (as was the case with all famous GDR authors from Bertolt Brecht to Heiner Müller), even if no high apparatchik were to desire his wife.

And exactly the same holds for the impeachment of Trump. It can be argued that Trump is a repellant person lacking a basic moral compass; however, what about the systematic violations of human rights in the continuous activities of the US intelligence agencies? The true enemies are not idiosyncratic figures who act as a disturbance to the establishment itself; the true enemies are honest patriotic bureaucrats ruthlessly pursuing US goals. To name names, the model of such a patriotic bureaucrat is James Comey, the FBI director deposed by Trump. Although, at the level of facts, Comey was probably mostly truthful in his critique of Trump (see his memoir *A Higher Loyalty*), one should nonetheless admit that his "higher loyalty" to the principles and values of the US leaves untouched what one cannot but call the criminal tendencies inscribed into US state

institutions, i.e., all that was revealed by Assange, Snowden and Manning.

One should also not forget that the movement to impeach Trump is mostly motivated by the desire to prove that Russia influenced the last presidential elections, enabling Trump to win. While there probably was Russian meddling (in the same way that the US tries to influence elections all around the world, with the difference being that they call their interventions “a defence of democracy”), the focus on this aspect obfuscates the true reason for Clinton’s defeat, her ruthless struggle against Bernie Sanders and the leftist wing of the Democratic Party. Sanders was right to warn that “if for the next year, year-and-a-half, going right into the heart of the election, all that the Congress is talking about is impeaching Trump and Trump, Trump, Trump, and Mueller, Mueller, Mueller, and we’re not talking about health care, we’re not talking about raising the minimum wage to a living wage, we’re not talking about combating climate change, we’re not talking about sexism and racism and homophobia, and all of the issues that concern ordinary Americans, what I worry about is that works to Trump’s advantage.”<sup>30</sup> Impeaching Trump is not a leftist project, it is a centrist-liberal project whose secret aim is also to weaken the leftist turn of the Democratic Party.

This brings us back to Marx: some of the best recent readings of Marx’s *Capital* shift the focus from the first to the second volume which deals with the circulation of capital, i.e., the cycle of its expanded self-reproduction; plus, in order to clarify this circular structure, they refer to the category of life as it is deployed in the second part of Hegel’s subjective logic (not life from his philosophy of nature, but life in its purely logical structure, life as “second nature,” as the objective self-reproductive movement of the notion that follows the subjective triad of notion-judgment-syllogism. The thesis that underlies this reading is that the self-movement of capital, its “life,” is the actual base of Hegel’s notion of the Absolute, of the absolute Idea: capital in its self-movement is the actuality of the Hegelian absolute subject. I find this reading, perspicuous as it is, problematic insofar as it has to conceive of the proletarian revolution, the breaking out of the capitalist system, as a move outside dialectics, into some non-mediated radical Otherness. Furthermore,

to put it somewhat in simplified Lacanian terms, the problematic premise of this reading is that capital is a big Other which exists, not an Other which only persists as a virtual point of reference of subjects who act as if it exists.

In the functioning of pre-digital capitalism as described by Marx, the tension between drive and desire remains fully operative: capital's drive is not the same as the desire of an individual capitalist who serves capital's self-reproduction. At this libidinal level, exploitation equals serving the enjoyment of the Other – the subject's desire is subordinated to the Other's drive, so that even if I suffer pain, I accept it if this pain serves the Other's enjoyment, i.e., capital's infinite drive for expanded self-reproduction – the infinite self-circulation of capital (as the “automatic subject”) parasitizes my finite desire. This enjoyment is, of course, not psychological, it is impersonal, a moment of the objective social structure of capital, but still not simply objective: it is presupposed by individual subjects as a virtual point of reference (in the same sense as the symbolic big Other is virtual: a non-psychological entity that only exists as the virtual point of reference of subjects and their activity). But what happens with Singularity, with my direct immersion in the collective space of the Other, is that the gap that separates subject's desire from the Other's drive collapses: when I am in a Singularity, my thoughts are no longer mine, they are directly the thoughts of Singularity thinking itself, I directly participate in the Other's drive.

This is why the prospect of Singularity opens up a way to step outside capitalism. Why does capitalism exert such ideological fascination? Why does it appear to many people as the social order that best fits human nature? Even many leftists privately admit that capitalism is the only thing that really works, and resign themselves to a more welfare-and-human-rights oriented capitalism, abandoning “full” socialism as an unworkable utopia ... Todd MacGowan<sup>[31](#)</sup> provided a Lacanian explanation of the resiliency of capitalism, boldly admitting that, in some (very qualified) sense capitalism effectively does fit “human nature.” In contrast to premodern social orders which obfuscate the paradox of human desire and presume that desire is structured in a straightforward teleological way (we humans strive towards some ultimate goal, be it happiness or

another kind of material or spiritual fulfilment, and aim at finding peace and satisfaction in its achievement), capitalism is the first and only social order that incorporates into its functioning the basic paradox of human desire. This paradox concerns the functioning of surplus in our libidinal economy: whatever we achieve is never “that,” we always want something else and more, and the ultimate aim of our desire is not to achieve some ultimate goal but to reproduce its own endless self-reproduction in an ever expanded form. This is why the imbalance of the system defines capitalism: capitalism can only thrive through its own constant self-undermining and revolutionizing. The paradox is that, because we desire the surplus that eludes every object, our very orientation towards pleasure and satisfaction compels us to permanently sacrifice available satisfactions on behalf of satisfactions to come – in capitalism, hedonism and asceticism coincide – or, to quote the concise recapitulation from the cover of MacGowan’s book:

Capitalism hides sacrifice and thus enables us to find our satisfaction in it without ever avowing the link between sacrifice and satisfaction. All satisfaction depends on some form of sacrifice – of time, of resources, of utility, and so on – but capitalism disguises sacrifice as self-interest, which enables capitalist subjects to engage in satisfying sacrifices while believing that they are just pursuing their self-interest.

What capitalism mobilizes and simultaneously obfuscates is that the ultimate source of pleasure is sacrifice itself: capitalism obfuscates this paradox by permanently dangling before our (producer’s and consumer’s) eyes the deceitful promise of future satisfaction. In short, instead of admitting that the promise of future satisfaction is just an illusory ploy to justify the present sacrifice and renunciations, capitalism turns things around and presents sacrifices and renunciations as means to achieve future satisfaction. Once this devilish logic of surplus is directly mobilized, there is no return to pre-capitalist balance – as Marx already saw clearly, liberation is possible only through capitalism. But what kind of liberation? One has to reject the dream of a different new libidinal economy outside the paradoxes of sacrifice and surplus, this secret dream of most

socialist and other radical utopias. The paradoxical structure of human desire is a kind of a priori: we cannot step out of it and (re)establish some new balanced universe in which we will not be fixated on a surplus, but just work for our satisfactions.

So how are we to step out of capitalism without falling into the premodern vision of a balanced universe? How to admit the basic structure of human desire without concluding that, since capitalism mobilizes this structure, it is in some sense unsurpassable, “eternal” and natural? As we have just seen, capitalism mobilizes this structure and simultaneously obfuscates its paradox. Consequently, the only solution is (not to say no to sacrifice and renunciation but) to openly admit and assume sacrifice and renunciation as such, with no teleological justification in future satisfactions. This is a difficult move since it involves admitting a very traumatic fact – recall the Stalinist purges in which millions were sacrificed on behalf of a future happy society, covering up the fact that the vision of future happiness served as a mask obfuscating the obscene pleasure of sacrifice as such. This is what, in the very last pages of his *Seminar XI*, Lacan alludes to when he says that

the offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice is something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell. Ignorance, indifference, an averting of the eyes may explain beneath what veil this mystery still remains hidden. But for whoever is capable of turning a courageous gaze towards this phenomenon – and, once again, there are certainly few who do not succumb to the fascination of the sacrifice in itself – the sacrifice signifies that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other that I call here the dark God.<sup>[32](#)</sup>

The alternative to this “monstrous spell” is not a happy life without sacrifices, but a “sacrifice” (expenditure) which is not an “offering to dark Gods,” i.e., which does not aim to do what it does for the enjoyment of the divine Other. Can we do it? Perhaps, the prospect of Singularity opens here a new prospect. When we are immersed in Singularity, the standard capitalist game of working for the enjoyment of the Other (Capital) while under the spell of pursuing one’s self-

interest can no longer work. This game can only function insofar as the distance between (infinite Capital's) drive and (finite subject's) desire is maintained, but in Singularity, this distance gets blurred: desire gets drowned in drive, alienation is full and directly palpable, giving us a chance to get rid of it.

Let us return from this point back to *The Matrix* which stages precisely such a full alienation. The premise of *The Matrix*<sup>33</sup> is that the very reality we live in, the fake reality staged by the Matrix, is in place so that we can effectively be reduced to a passive state of living batteries providing the Matrix with energy. The unique impact of the film thus resides not so much in its central thesis (that what we experience as reality is an artificial virtual reality generated by the "Matrix," the mega-computer directly attached to all our minds), but in its central image of millions of human beings leading a claustrophobic life in a water-filled cradle, kept alive in order to generate the energy (electricity) for the Matrix. So when (some of the) people "awaken" from their immersion in the Matrix-controlled virtual reality, this awakening is not the opening into the wide space of the external reality, but first the horrible realization of this enclosure, where each of us is effectively just a fetus-like organism, immersed in the pre-natal fluid ... This utter passivity is the ultimate *perverse* fantasy, the notion that we are ultimately *instruments* of the Other's (the Matrix's) *jouissance*, sucked out of our life-substance like batteries. Therein resides the true libidinal enigma of this *dispositif*: WHY does the Matrix *need* human energy? The purely energetic solution is, of course, meaningless: the Matrix could have easily found another, more reliable, source of energy which would have not demanded the extremely complex arrangement of the virtual reality coordinated for millions of human units. The only consistent answer is: the Matrix feeds on the human's *jouissance* – so we are here back at the fundamental Lacanian thesis that the big Other itself, far from being an anonymous machine, needs the constant influx of *jouissance*. This is how we should turn around the state of things presented by the film: what the film renders as the scene of our awakening into our true situation, is effectively its exact opposition, the very fundamental fantasy that sustains our being. So it is not that we (the exploited) do not enjoy but just work for the

enjoyment of the Other – we do enjoy, even emphatically (as it is clearly rendered by the central image of the film, humans in a fetus-like passive position silently enjoying), and it is this very enjoyment that is appropriated by the Other – this Other which can be the Capital in consumerist exploitation, the bureaucracy in state exploiting its subjects ... and, in a homologous way, the Singularity exploiting us when we enjoy our immersion in it.

And this brings us to the paradox of exploitation at work in the Matrix: the enjoyment the Matrix sucks from individuals does not set the individuals free, what they get from the Matrix for continuously providing with enjoyment is a growing state of indebtedness: the more enjoyment is sucked out of individuals by the Matrix, the more debt these individuals occur. For this reason, the subject's alienation can also be formulated in terms of infinite debt: in alienation, indebted, haunted by a debt it can never repay, whose repayment is an infinite task. And it is homologous with states themselves: from the rise of capitalism, states have reproduced themselves by becoming indebted. Here we have a nice example of the properly historical dialectics in which something that emerges as such only today (universal indebtedness) is seen as operative from the very beginning of capitalism. Marx wrote that “with the emergence of state indebteding, lack of faith in the national debt takes the place of the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness.”<sup>34</sup> Are these lines today not more actual than ever – recall the Greek crisis which was all about debt and was “solved” with *more debt*, of course? This shift from exploited worker to indebted individual has radical political consequences: it makes the rise of class consciousness, i.e., transformation of the exploited workers into proletarians aware of their revolutionary historical role, almost impossible since their indebtedness individualizes them: “Neoliberal capitalism has established an asymmetric class struggle that it governs. There is only one class gathered around finance, the power of credit and money as capital. The working class is no longer a class. The number of workers has considerably increased since the 1970s all around the world, but they no longer constitute a political class and will never again constitute one. The workers do have a sociological and economic existence”<sup>35</sup> – no longer as a proletarian



class but as indebted individual responsible for their fate. Althusser's formula of ideology as interpellation of individuals into subjects is here turned around: ideology interpellates subjects into (indebted) individuals.

Will then Singularity also work like the Matrix, as the Substance that will feed on our enjoyment? There are good arguments for this. All descriptions of Singularity *de facto* point towards a structure of radical alienation, to the rise of a new form of the divine big Other into which the subject is fully immersed so that the subject's activity coincides with the activity of Singularity itself (recall Lacan's definition of male mysticism as a perverse structure in which my view of god coincides with god's view of himself). Marx wrote that with large factory machine industry, the form of production process in its material reality fits capitalist structure: the worker is no longer an artisan who individually uses his tools to work on some matter but an appendix to a machine taking care of its smooth functioning. In the same way the worker is an appendix to capital. Is, in a homologous way, the very form of Singularity not a structure of radical alienation in which the subject is thoroughly deprived of all content, inclusive of its inner life? We should pursue this parallel between Singularity and capital further. Gerard Lebrun mentions the "fascinating image" of the Capital presented by Marx (especially in his *Grundrisse*): "a monstrous mixture of the good infinity and the bad infinity, the good infinity which creates its presuppositions and the conditions of its growth, the bad infinity which never ceases to surmount its crises, and which finds its limit in its own nature."<sup>36</sup> Actually, it is in *Capital* itself that we find this Hegelian description of the circulation of capital:

in the circulation M-C-M, both the money and the commodity represent only different modes of existence of value itself, the money its general mode, and the commodity its particular, or, so to say, disguised mode. It is constantly changing from one form to the other without thereby becoming lost, and thus assumes an automatically active character ... Value, therefore, being the active factor in such a process, and assuming at one time the form of money, at another that of commodities, but through all these



changes preserving itself and expanding, it requires some independent form, by means of which its identity may at any time be established. And this form it possesses only in the shape of money. It is under the form of money that value begins and ends, and begins again, every act of its own spontaneous generation.<sup>37</sup>

Note how Hegelian references abound here: with capitalism, value is not a mere abstract “mute” universality, a substantial link between the multiplicity of commodities; from the passive medium of exchange, it turns into the “active factor” of the entire process. Instead of only passively assuming the two different forms of its actual existence (money – commodity), it appears as the subject “endowed with a motion of its own, passing through a life-process of its own”: it differentiates itself from itself, positing its otherness, and then again overcomes this difference – the entire movement is *its own* movement. In this precise sense, “instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it enters ... into private relations with itself”: the “truth” of its relating to its otherness is its self-relating, i.e., in its self-movement, the capital retroactively “sublates” its own material conditions, changing them into subordinate moments of its own “spontaneous expansion” – in pure Hegelese, it posits its own presuppositions. Crucial in the quoted passage is the expression “an automatically active character,” an inadequate translation of the German words used by Marx to characterize capital as “*automatischem Subjekt*,” an “automatic subject,” the oxymoron uniting living subjectivity and dead automatism. This is what capital is: a subject, but an automatic one, not a living one – and, again, can Hegel think this “monstrous mixture,” a process of subjective self-mediation and retroactive positing of presuppositions which as it were gets caught in a substantial “spurious infinity,” a subject which itself becomes an alienated substance?

And, afresh, does exactly the same not also hold for Singularity into which we will eventually be immersed? Will Singularity not be a new version of such an “automatic subject”? We should bring this parallel to its conclusion: in the same way as the figure of capital as an automatic subject is an ideological fantasy (although a fantasy

with real social effects, immanent to the movement of the capital), the figure of Singularity as a divine mega-Subject in whose activity we participate is also another ideological fantasy. Singularity does not imply our alienation in the (symbolic/virtual) big Other: Singularity will take place in the Real. However, insofar as subject will be not just immersed in Singularity but also radically alienated in Singularity (since, as we have speculated, the subject will survive in it as the evanescent point of pure void), is then “separation” here not the Unconscious itself as correlative to the pure subject (\$) ? In short, does the virtual big Other itself not enable us to acquire a minimum of separation from the digital big Other? Is the Symbolic as such not a minimal form of separation?

The problem is, of course, that in our dealing with the digital network, these two dimensions (the virtual/symbolic big Other and the actual digital big Other) tend to get confused, so that we tend to project onto the digital machine which is part of material reality the dimension of the symbolic big Other, to treat it as a “subject supposed to know” (or not to know, i.e., the entity from which we succeed in hiding our intimate secrets). One can argue that this confusion is what defines the notion of Singularity: a materially existing big Other which is simultaneously a divine Other. This confusion brings us close to paranoia: in paranoia, the virtual Other – which, as Lacan put it, doesn’t exist – is perceived as existing in reality (in the guise of our persecutor). In order to fight this confusion, the two dimensions have to be kept apart, which means that the digital Other (the digital network) has to be treated as what it is, as a vast stupid machine which operates blindly.

To resume, human participants who inhabit Singularity automatically (in an effect of spontaneous ideology) conflate the real digital Other (the digital machine that sustains the contact between wired brains and thereby our immersion in Singularity) with the symbolic “big Other” – the two surreptitiously coincide, the real Other (the digital machine that sustains our immersion in Singularity) is elevated into the symbolic big Other, it is perceived as a figure of symbolic authority, as a divine partner or space in which I dwell. The first task of the critique of ideology is therefore here to desublimize Singularity, to reintroduce the distance between the two dimensions,

to reduce the digital Other to the stupidity of a blind machine, to deprive it of the aura of a secret Master.<sup>38</sup> In short, the figure of Singularity should be desublimated, deprived of the dignity of a Thing.

However, how are we to combine this urgent need to desublimated Singularity, to deprive it of its quasi-divine status, with the proposal to determine the shift from repression (which sustains exploitation) to a new libidinal economy without repressive exploitation as a move from repression to sublimation? “In the regime of repression the only change possible is the change of objects, but not ‘the change of object in itself.’” One should give to these lines their full Hegelian dignity, recalling Hegel’s claim that in experience *Erfahrung* it is not only our perception of the object that changes but the object itself. So how does this change work? What does the subject do with the object? Instead of repression, i.e., repressive displacement of our libidinal investment from one object to another (as in our example of compulsive behavior where our libidinal investment is displaced from the illicit activity to the ritual of punishment for this activity), the subject enacts sublimation – the same object (in this case the illicit sexual activity) is “elevated to the dignity of the Thing,” the impossible-real object of desire.

In order to grasp how exploitation is overcome by sublimation, it is not enough to stay with this standard definition of sublimation as the elevation of an ordinary object to the dignity of a Thing. As Lacan aptly demonstrated apropos courtly love, an ordinary object (woman) is there elevated to the dignity of the Thing, she becomes an “inhuman partner,” dangerous to get too close to, always out of reach, mixing horror and respect. The paradox of desire is here brought to an extreme, turning the experience of love into an endlessly postponed tragedy. In true love, however, comedy enters: while the beloved remains a Thing, it is simultaneously “desublimated,” accepted in all her ridiculous bodily imperfections. A true miracle is thus achieved: I can hold the Thing-*jouissance* in my hands, making fun of it and playing games with it, enjoying it without restraint – true love doesn’t idealize – or, as Lacan put it in his seminar on anxiety: “Only love-sublimation makes it possible for *jouissance* to condescend to desire.”<sup>39</sup>

This enigmatic proposition was perspicuously interpreted by Alenka Zupančič who demonstrated how, in the comedy of love, sublimation paradoxically comprises its opposite, desublimation – you remain the Thing, but simultaneously I can use you for my enjoyment: “to love the other and to desire my own *jouissance*. To ‘desire one’s own *jouissance*’ is probably what is the hardest to obtain and to make work, since the enjoyment has trouble appearing as an object.”<sup>40</sup> One should not shirk from a quite concrete and graphic description of what this amounts to: I love you, and I show this by fucking you just for pleasure, mercilessly objectivizing you – this is how I am no longer exploited by serving the Other’s enjoyment. When I worry all the time whether you also enjoy it, it is not love – “I love you” means: I want to be used as an object for your enjoyment. One should reject here all the Catholic nonsense of preferring the missionary position in sex because lovers can whisper tender words and communicate spiritually, and even Kant was too short here when he reduced the sexual act to reducing my partner to an instrument of my pleasure: self-objectivization *is* the proof of love, you find being used degrading only if there is no love. This enjoyment of mine should not be constrained even by the tendency to enable my partner to reach orgasm simultaneously with me – Brecht was right when, in his poem “Orges Wunschliste,” he includes in the wish-list of his preferences non-simultaneous orgasms: “*Von den Mädchen, die neuen. / Von den Weibern, die ungetreuen. / Von den Orgasmen, die ungleichzeitigen. / Von den Feindschaften, die beiderseitigen.*” “Of the girls, the new. / Of the women, the unfaithful. / Of orgasms, the non-simultaneous. / Of the animosities, the mutual.”

But there seem to be two sublimations in another sense: the “good” one (sublimating the object instead of submitting it to the labor of repression), and the “bad” one of sublimating (elevating to the dignity of a Thing) capital (or Singularity) into a divine Thing, a trans-human monster that automatically reproduces itself through us, through our activity. There is a subtle difference between the two: what is sublimated in the “bad” sublimation is not a concrete libidinal object or practice but the very global space of the alienated force that controls our lives and exploits us, libidinally and/or economically.

To clarify this distinction between the two modes of sublimation, we have to further specify the shift from repression to sublimation characterized by Tomšič as the shift from the infinite (substance) parasitizing on finite (individuals/subjects) to infinite as the inflection of the finite (subject): “if repression stands for a parasitism of infinite on the finite and the exploitation of the subject’s alienation, then sublimation is grounded on an inverse parasitism, that of the finite on the infinite” – this parasitism means that a finite ordinary object parasitizes on the infinite Thing. So, again, in the “bad” sublimation, singular objects are not elevated to the dignity of a Thing, they are merely reduced to a vanishing moment in the eternal circular movement of the Thing which passes from one to another form of appearance, while, in the “good” sublimation, a singular object, in its very finitude, stands for the Thing, i.e., parasitizes on the infinite. It’s like in love where a singular ordinary person, with all of her or his faults, turns into the unshakable fixed point of my libidinal investment. These two forms of sublimation are well-known from tradition: the “bad” one is that of traditional wisdom – all phenomena are passing, the only Real Thing is the Abyss into which all that is disappears – while the true one is best encapsulated by the Christian notion of love violently privileging a singular subject, a love that is exclusive, introducing extreme imbalance into the universe.

However, the formula of inverted parasitism is in itself insufficient. Capitalist production for the sake of production only works if it is experienced by the workers as production to satisfy their needs, externally teleological. It is thus the very capitalist parasitizing of the infinite (capital) on the finite (worker) which “finitizes” the worker. In Communism, it will not be simply the finite which parasitizes on the infinite, but a different infinite – infinite is subject itself, the loop of its self-enhancing productivity, and let’s not forget that subject is in its very notion a singular entity, a One that excludes the multiplicity of reality. This is why “production for the sake of production,” and not to satisfy the worker’s needs, is not just a form of capitalist alienation: it also defines Communism in which production is for its own sake, to fulfill our creative potentials. In other words, the problem with the “bad” sublimation is that the Infinite which parasitizes on transient finites is a case of what Hegel called “bad (spurious) infinity.”

When we move beyond alienation, subjectivity (its singular force of negativity) is, of course, fully asserted, but not in the usual “Hegelian” sense that served as a model for Marx (a subject re-appropriates alienated substance, recognizes it as its own work); what happens in dis-alienation is just the redoubling of alienation, which Lacan called separation. What gets separated from what here if alienation already stands for the separation of the Other from the subject (who is also in this way decentered, separated from itself, with its center of gravity outside itself)? The big Other gets separated from itself, it gets de-substantialized, inconsistent, lacking a foundation, moving in a circle, cut through with antagonisms. We encounter here again the Hegelian topic of disparity: redoubling alienation means that the subject’s disparity with substance is reflected back into Substance itself, as its disparity with itself.

This distinction between alienation and separation also compels us to approach in a new way our engagement against the threat of an ecological catastrophe. One often hears that, in order to confront appropriately the threat of an ecological catastrophe, we have to renounce “anthropocentrism” and to conceive of ourselves (humanity) as a subordinated element in the great chain of Being: we are just one species on our planet, but through our ruthless exploitation of its resources, we (humanity) are posing a threat to our mother Earth, and that Earth is punishing us through global warming and other ecological threats ... One cannot but laugh at this vision: not Earth, but *we* are in trouble, Earth is indifferent, it has survived much worse disasters than the possible self-destruction of one of its species. What is under threat is *our* environment, *our* habitat, the only one in which we can live. From the imagined standpoint of Earth it would be much better for its global ecosystem if we (humanity) disappeared, so what is under threat in “ecological crisis” is *our* survival, the survival of our society. And therein resides the hidden anthropocentrism of such anti-anthropocentric visions: in spite of all the babble about privileging Earth over our interests, what we are after is (an environment that would befit) our survival and well-being. This is also why the true stakes of ecology are socio-political: ecology is not about caring for Nature, it is about a social reorganization to maximize the conditions of our well-being. Greta

Thunberg is fully aware of this: when she refers to science (admonishing politicians to listen to science), she addresses politicians, not scientists: her aim is not to leave politics behind, it is not depoliticization, but to contribute to the rise of a new politics, a politics that would be effectively universal, addressing us all while (as befits all politics) still dividing us (i.e., fighting against those who deny the threat of an ecological catastrophe). Ecological struggle is politics at its most radical.<sup>41</sup> Another version of universal politics is the one associated with the names Assange-Snowden-Manning, that of “spying for the people,” disclosing to the public problematic state secrets. With regard to one’s own sovereign state, such an activity is “treasonous,” which is why it is by definition universal, i.e., “betraying” one’s fidelity to one’s own state.

Greta did change in the last months: she changed from the naïve and innocent girl saying that the emperor is naked to a smiling-aggressive sharp-tongued demon; but her message remains the same, simple and repeated. One should recall here Kierkegaard’s wonderful short text “On the Difference between Genius and Apostle,” where he defines genius as the individual who is able to express/articulate “that which is in him more than himself,” his spiritual substance, in contrast to the apostle who “in himself” does not matter at all: the apostle is a purely formal function of the one who dedicated his life to bearing witness to an impersonal Truth that transcends him. He is a messenger who was chosen (by grace): he possesses no inner features that would qualify him for this role. Lacan mentions here a diplomat who serves as a representative of his country: his idiosyncrasies are irrelevant, whatever he does is read as a message from his country to the country in which he is posted – if, at a big diplomatic conference, he coughs, this is interpreted as softly signaling his state’s doubt about the measures debated at the conference, etc. And Lacan’s paradoxical conclusion is that the Freudian “subject of the unconscious” (or what Lacan calls “subject of the signifier”) has the structure of the Kierkegaardian apostle: he is the witness of an “impersonal” Truth. Is what we encounter in hysteria not precisely a “body of truth”: in the bodily symptoms that result from the hysterical “conversion,” the immediate organic body is invaded, kidnapped, by a Truth, transformed into a



bearer of truth, into a space/surface onto which the Truths (of the unconscious) are inscribed – hysteria is the ultimate case of Lacan's *c'est moi, la verite, qui parle*. In short, the structure is here that of a Kierkegaardian apostle: the body is cancelled/suspended as indifferent in its immediate reality; it is taken over as the medium of Truth. And Greta is also not a creative genius but an apostle of a truth: she does not bring forward some ingenious new insights; she just repeats the same simple message again and again. Talking about politicians, she said: "We have not taken to the streets for them to take selfies with us, and tell us that they really, really admire what we do. We children are doing this to wake the adults up"<sup>42</sup> – this is how a true apostle talks, effacing herself from the picture again and again, fully aware that the focus on her, even if it is celebratory, works as a distraction from her message.

It may appear that such a position of the apostle is the clearest case of alienation: apostle is a subject who, in an act of radical *kenosis*, empties itself of all self-expressive content in order to function as an impassive transmitter of the big Other's message. However, one has to go through this zero-point in order to discern the inconsistency and self-blockade of this big Other itself, i.e., in order to bring out how the Truth itself which speaks through me is non-all, traversed by an immanent impossibility. When Greta calls us to listen to science and take it seriously, this does not mean that science also provides the political answers to what we are to do. Science enables us to discern the contours of the deadlock in which we are (the catastrophic ecological implications of our economic development, etc.), but there is no "scientific politics" – when we hear this slogan, we are right to suspect the worst of manipulation and domination. Politics is subjective in the most radical sense of the term, while science – as Lacan put it – forecloses the dimension of subject. The science we should listen to is not a neutral instrument of salvation but something we should overcome, learn to think beyond its horizon. Greta is not a totalitarian acting as an instrument of the scientific big Other, she is proposing scientific data as the base which should compel us elaborate a new emancipatory project and act upon it.



This also means that we need a concept of alienation which reaches beyond its Marxist version. So, to conclude, the parallel between alienation in the signifier and the capitalist alienation of which Marx speaks, alienation that pertains to commodity fetishism and the appropriation of surplus-value, is misleading – to simplify it to the utmost, subject's alienation in the signifier is constitutive of the subject, while capitalist alienation characterizes a certain historically limited mode of production. (Although, for Marx, capitalism is not just one among the modes of production but an exception which functions as the symptomal point of entire history, and as such universal in its meaning.) Alienation in the signifier and the Unconscious will never be abolished as long as we are dealing with subjectivity, while capitalism can be abolished, which is why the parallel between *wo es war soll ich werden* (the subject appropriating its unconscious substance) and the proletarian struggle against capital (and for the appropriation of social substance) misses the key point. Communism is not an endless process of overcoming capitalism, in the same way as psychoanalysis never abolishes the Unconscious: Communism, of course, will not be a perfect state of human fulfilment, it will generate its own antagonisms, but they will be qualitatively different from capitalist antagonisms. Plus they will not mean that Communism is an endless unfinished project, a goal we will never reach: Communism will be defined by these new antagonisms in exactly the same way as capitalism is defined by its own specific antagonisms.<sup>43</sup>

Marx's "Hegelian" scheme of a collective subject appropriating alienated historical substance fails because it ignores the dimension of the symbolic big Other: Marx's vision of a self-transparent society is the vision of a society with no big Other. Marx does determine proletariat as *substanzlose Subjektivitaet*, but in his scheme, substanceless subjectivity (a worker reduced to pure capacity-to-work since all substantial content is taken away from him by the capital) is reduced to a moment of extreme alienation which announces the revolutionary reversal by means of which the collective subject will re-appropriate its alienated substance. In Hegel and Lacan, on the contrary, substanceless subject is subject as such, its constitutive negativity, and the only way it can "overcome"

its alienation from its substance is to pass from alienation to separation, i.e., to perceive itself as an effect of the crack, disparity, in the substance itself – subject means that substance is already alienated from itself.

One can easily understand why Soviet tech-gnostics were dreaming about something like Singularity – Singularity may appear a caricatural realization of Communism: all humans drowned in one great Mind, no individuality, everything shared and transparent ... here we recall the coded vision of Communism from the early 1950s science fiction paranoias about the invasion of body snatchers. The invading aliens taking over our bodies are portrayed like ants without individuality, totally controlled by one central Mind. Singularity thus stands for utter alienation of Subject in Substance, where this Substance loses its mysterious transcendent character and becomes a field of transparency, a god which is definitely not hidden. Singularity thus promises something unthinkable within the classic Marxist universe: a social space which is transparent, totally immanent, no longer haunted by an alienated big Other. In short, in Singularity, extreme alienation (of subject in substance) coincides with the self-abolition of alienation.

The prospect of Singularity opens up a unique chance of reasserting the signifying alienation without the capitalist alienation. The paradox is that, once we are dealing with the prospect of Singularity, the task of liberation is no longer to abolish alienation – in a perverted way this will already be achieved in Singularity – but, on the contrary, to *re-establish alienation in the big Other as constitutive of subjectivity*. It is no longer to engage in the task of *wes war soll ich werden*, of abolishing/appropriating the Unconscious, but to open up the very space of the Unconscious threatened by Singularity.

At a more general level, one should bear in mind that the prospect of the wired brain fits perfectly the growing trend of indiscretion. Tyi Starr, an Australian porn star, announced that she would sell a video of her giving birth, claiming that she does not perceive her actions as “wrong” and has no need to defend them.<sup>[44](#)</sup> If the wired brain will be developed on an individual basis (I decide who I connect with), one can easily predict the next step: share my experience of giving birth

... Some “radical” cis-feminists will probably celebrate this gesture as a step towards “demystifying” the vagina, making us aware that it is not just the ultimate object of sexual desire but also has other functions – however, one can also argue that Starr’s gesture does the exact opposite, i.e., that it sexualizes the act of giving birth. Starr is right that there is nothing “wrong” with what she is planning to do; one should only add that the standard hardcore depiction of the sexual act to which we are all used is much more shamelessly-intrusive than depicting the act of giving birth.

Whatever our stance, the main thing is to keep in mind the growing trend towards radical indiscretion that sustains Starr’s act, and the explosive potentials of this trend – as Sloterdijk puts it: “More communication means at first above all the more conflict.”<sup>45</sup> This is why Sloterdijk is right to claim that the attitude of “understanding-each-other” has to be supplemented by the attitude of “getting-out-of-each-other’s-way,” by maintaining an appropriate distance, by implementing a new “code of discretion.” European civilization finds it easier to tolerate different ways of life precisely on account of what its critics usually denounce as its weakness and failure, namely the alienation of social life. One of the things alienation means is that distance is included in the very social texture of everyday life: even if I live side by side with others, in my normal state I ignore them. I am allowed not to get too close to others. I move in a social space where I interact with others obeying certain external “mechanical” rules, without sharing their inner world. Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that, sometimes, a dose of alienation is indispensable for the peaceful coexistence of different ways of life. Sometimes *alienation* is not a problem but a solution, especially when we are confronting the prospect of total indiscretion in Singularity.

Plus there is a further paradox at work here: since, in Singularity, alienation brought to an extreme coincides with its own abolition, *the only way to bring alienation back is through separation* as the operation which logically follows and counteracts alienation, i.e., through transposing the alienation of the subject from the big Other into the big Other itself.

## The End of History

Will, then, the eventual rise of Singularity be the end of history, and if yes, in what sense? The first thing to do before we tackle this question is to distinguish between historicity proper and historicism. The just outlined difference between the two modes of moving beyond alienation – separation and the simple humanist notion of dis-alienation as a return to some kind of restored unity – can be of some help here insofar as it enables us to discern the danger of hasty historicization. The difference that separates historicity proper from mere historicism can also be captured by Lacan's "formulas of sexuation." Historicism is clearly masculine: all social reality is ultimately contingent, constructed in historically specific circumstances, there are no trans-historical essentials, the basic form of ideology is the eternalization of some historically specific content ... however, such a historicist approach exempts from the domain of historical relativism its own stance which is silently universalized, i.e., historicism applies the same notion of history to all historical epochs.

We can discern this exception when we raise a simple question apropos the anti-essentialist thesis that all forms of social identity are contingent constructs: say, when proponents of gender theory claim that every gender identity is a contingent historical construct, does this apply in the same way to our late-capitalist societies as well as to pre-historic tribal or hunter societies? If the answer is yes, then we have to surmise that we live in a privileged era when the historical contingency of every identity became obvious, i.e., we are caught privileging our own epoch. In contrast to historicism, the basic feature of authentic historicity is that it is feminine in the sense of Lacan's formulas of sexuation: it abolishes this exception, i.e., it relativizes its own position and thus historicizes its own notion of historicity. It is in this sense that Hegel is a radical historicist: for him, with every historical epoch, the universal notion of history also changes. Such an approach thus allows for no exception to historicity and is for this reason "non-all": there is no single universal notion of historicity since this notion is itself caught in the process of historical change.

So how does this distinction apply to the topic of historicizing our basic notion of being-human? When Tupinamba deploys the implications of the radical historicization of analytic clinics, he aptly refers to the Kantian distinction between negative judgments (judgments that negate a predicate, like “he is not dead”) and infinite judgments (judgments that assert a non-predicate, like “he is undead”). Along the same lines, Tupinamba proposes the distinction between the negation of positive universals and affirmation of negative universals:

Considered only in its structural aspect, Freud’s investigation could simply seem like a negation of positive universals – a movement that unproblematically binds clinical practice and metapsychological theory – and therefore appears as a rather static process, concerning solely the analyst and his subversive position. But what this picture is missing is the essential dynamism through which the contradiction of previously held universal claims enriches our understanding of how to listen to new patients: a transformation of what is considered invariant in the space of the possible, and therefore an affirmation of negative universals – more may vary in the space of subjective solutions to sexuation than we previously imagined.<sup>46</sup>

While one should fully endorse this line of thought, one should just give it a different reading. For Tupinamba, affirming negative universals means simply that one should bring historicist relativization to the end, widening the space of variations, while in my reading, such relativization is already enacted in the “negation of positive universals” which remains caught in what Hegel called “bad infinity”: it is “static” in its over-dynamization itself, a process that reached its peak in “postmodern” historicist relativism. Every positive universality is “deconstructed,” it is demonstrated how its universality is biased, how it secretly privileges and eternalizes a content which is a contingent historical variable. But we should always bear in mind that historicization can also be ideology, not only because it applies a procedure of historicization (clearly grounded in our time) to all epochs, but, more importantly, when it reduces to a historical variable a basic feature of a certain domain.

Along these lines, Fredric Jameson rejected the (once fashionable) notion of “alternate modernities,” i.e., the claim that our Western liberal-capitalist modernity is just one of the paths to modernization, and that other paths are possible which could avoid the deadlocks and antagonism of our modernity: once we realize that “modernity” is ultimately a code name for capitalism, it is easy to see that such historicist relativization of our modernity is sustained by the ideological dream of a capitalism which would avoid its constitutive antagonisms – was Fascism not the exemplary case of alternate modernity? In a strictly homologous way, the reduction of the impasses of sexuality to a specific historical constellation (say, of Western patriarchy) opens up the space for the utopia of a full sexuality without its impasses and perversions which, as Freud demonstrated, inhabit its very notion. The way out of this ideological deadlock is to supplement the negation of positive universals with the assertion of negative universals, i.e., with an impossibility constitutive of the entire domain: yes, all positive universals are relative, unstable; they can be transformed, but not simply because of the dynamic and changeable form of reality. Positive formations are so many attempts to deal with the same underlying antagonism, and what triggers change is the ultimate failure of every attempt to resolve this antagonism. One of Lacan’s negative universals is “there is no sexual relationship,” which means that it is not enough to point out the immanent instability and historical character of the traditional gender binary – one should also add that every determinate form of gender relationship, no matter how open and flexible it is, will fail to overcome the impossibility constitutive of human sexuality.

It is thus crucial to keep in view how ideological limitation works in two opposed directions. Ideology is not only the eternalization of a specific historical situation; it is also the reduction to a specific contingent property of something that is constitutive of the entire field. Ideology is not only the elevation of capitalism into the most appropriate and rational economic order; it is also the dismissal of crises and antagonisms that characterize capitalism into a deviation due to particular contingent circumstances, and the accompanying idea that another capitalism is possible which would avoid crises and antagonisms. And this distinction also has important implications for

any attempt to try to understand how the fact of a wired brain will affect us: it will not only compel us to historicize our form of subjectivity; it will also compel us to resist the temptation to imagine simply a different form of awareness akin to the dream of alternate modernity – as if we will get with a wired brain the same awareness we have now, just freed from the constraints of finitude, i.e., as if post-humanity will be just a humanity expanded and raised to a higher level.

We can see now why the prospect of Singularity is today's main candidate for the end of history: after it will take place, the rest will not be history – at least not history as we knew it and experienced it. This brings us yet again back to the Hegelian territory, since Hegel is *the* philosopher of the end of history – however, the end of history in Singularity cannot but appear as something totally different from Hegel's notion of this end. Can we then learn something about it from Hegel? Maybe, we should begin with an aporia in the very heart of Hegel's notion of the end of history.

Historicizing his own position remains a problem for Hegel – it is as if he lacks the proper terms to formulate it. While he insists on the closure of Absolute Knowing (AK), he often adds a weird temporal qualification: “for the time being,” or something similar. So how is AK historicized? Can Hegel think the historical limitation of his own position? In some sense, the answer is no, of course: historicization of one's own position implies that we can somehow step on our shoulders and look at ourselves from the outside, so that we can see our own relativity, so AK is the necessary consequence of radical self-historicization. However, to put it in a brutally naïve way: does Hegel's logic really provide the definitive (and in this sense ahistorical) matrix of all possible modes of rationality? Does quantum physics not require a set of categories not found in Hegel? So what should we do today, just continue relying on the structure of Hegel's logic or rewrite it, introducing new categories? In a critical stab at my position on this topic, MacGowan writes that Hegel's claim about the end of history

is stronger than an admission that the end of history constantly imposes itself on us as historical subjects. Instead, Hegel believes we will never move beyond the recognition that all are free, which



is the recognition that occurs in modern Europe (as well as in North America and Haiti). This does not mean that significant historical events will cease or that no new avenues for the articulation of freedom will be discovered – like some new form of communism, for instance. But, for Hegel, history as a field for the unfolding of new insights into existence reaches its conclusion with the recognition of universal freedom, which occurs with the development of modernity and the French Revolution.<sup>47</sup>

But is the assertion of universal freedom in modernity really a break that “no subsequent event can ever top”?<sup>48</sup> One can argue that it is rather the middle term in the triad of Christianity, modern political freedom and what Communism envisages as social freedom. We begin with the inner spiritual liberation (we are all equal in Christ), we pass to political liberation (freedom in the political public space), and after that, the prospect of a social liberation opens up. In spite of all that is problematic in Marx’s dealing with freedom, he made a valuable point with his claim that the market economy combines in a unique way political and personal freedom with social unfreedom: personal freedom (freely selling myself on the market) is the very form of my unfreedom. This does not mean that political freedom is just a bourgeois illusion masking the reality of exploitation and servitude – the problem is much more serious.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, new forms of mastery and domination have appeared for which there is simply no place within the established coordinates of Hegel’s political thought: while there is a place in Hegel for bloody tyrants who follow their private interests, there is no place for evil embedded in state machinery itself and performed by faithful administrators; there is no place for democratically elected populist charismatic leaders gaining votes by way of openly displaying their obscenity.

While, in a market economy, I remain de facto dependent, this dependency is nonetheless “civilized,” enacted in the form of a “free” market exchange between me and other persons instead of the form of direct servitude or even physical coercion. It is easy to ridicule Ayn Rand, but there is a grain of truth in the famous “hymn to money” from her *Atlas Shrugged*: “Until and unless you discover that money

is the root of all good, you ask for your own destruction. When money ceases to become the means by which men deal with one another, then men become the tools of other men. Blood, whips and guns or dollars. Take your choice – there is no other.”<sup>49</sup> Did Marx not say something similar in his well-known formula of how, in the universe of commodities, “relations between people assume the guise of relations among things”? In the market economy, relations between people can appear as relations of mutually recognized freedom and equality: domination is no longer directly enacted and visible as such. Really-existing Socialism in the twentieth century proved that the overcoming of the market-alienation abolishes “alienated” freedom and with it freedom tout court, bringing us back to “non-alienated” relations of direct domination. How to imagine a communal space without a regulating agency which controls the very medium of collaboration and thereby exerts direct domination? It is thus clear that that a “Communist” society would involve new “contradictions” – can we surmise what they would be? Fredric Jameson fearlessly proposed envy as the main candidate.

And we should apply Marx’s axiom that a social formation is ultimately defined by its founding “contradiction” (and by how it tries to cope with it) also to a post-capitalist society – and also to the prospect of a society in which wired brains play an important role. Instead of trying to imagine distinct alternate options (a society deprived of human individuals; a society of happy shared experiences), we should focus on the new “contradiction” that will emerge. Will then, if we do enter Singularity, the universe of meaning, the symbolic dimension, still be there or will it disappear as if it never existed? Neither of the two: it will disappear, but its disappearance will continue to be felt as an absence. In short, it will function as an absential of Singularity. The irony is that subject will survive as the absential, embodying the very dimension (of differentiability) that, as we can presume, will escape Singularity.

This is how we should deal with the key alternative here: even if the subject’s Unconscious in principle eludes the grasp of Singularity, what if this does not mean that there will be a dimension which will elude Singularity but something much more simple and radical: the subject will pay its entry into Singularity by simply *losing the*

*dimension of the Unconscious?* In short, what if its immersion in Singularity will preclude the dimension of the Unconscious, leaving no space for it? What if this immersion means that the scope of subjectivity will be limited to what is registered by Singularity? This will not be the case because the very disappearance of the symbolic loss (“Fall”) will continue to echo in the space of Singularity.

Furthermore, with our entry into Singularity, will the very space of the Hegelian dialectics of recognition not disappear? The “testing” of two subjects when they confront each other becomes pointless when the intimate self-experience of each of them is directly accessible to other(s) ... One can nonetheless venture the hypothesis that, insofar as the subject of the Unconscious survives at a distance from the shared space of Singularity, a new space of recognition opens up in which this very status of subject is at stake: in a new “fight to the death” I have to prove that I cannot be reduced to my place in Singularity ...

The distance between our inner life, the line of our thoughts, and external reality is the basis of the perception of ourselves as free: we are free in our thoughts precisely insofar as they are at a distance from reality, so that we can play with them, make thought-experiments, engage in dreaming, with no direct consequences in reality, no one can control us there. Once our inner life is directly linked to reality so that our thoughts have direct consequences in reality (or can be directly regulated by a machine that is part of reality) and are in this sense no longer “ours,” we effectively enter a post-human state. The subject that will survive will thus not be the bearer of the wealth of inner experience – all that wealth of feelings, passions, fears, dreams and hopes, etc., could well be drowned in the collective space of Singularity. The subject will survive as a pure \$, the vanishing point of negativity separated from all of its experienced content. In short, the subject will be divided more than ever, divided not between itself and its other(s) but divided in itself, between its content (separated from it) and the punctuality of \$ (barred zero-point of subjectivity).

This punctual status of *cogito* becomes clear only later, with its Kantian reformulation. The Kantian Self-Consciousness is a purely logical function which signals only that every content of my

consciousness is already minimally mediated/reflected: when I desire X, I can never say “I am simply like that, I cannot help desiring X, it’s part of my nature,” since, I always desire to desire X, i.e. I reflectively accept my desire for X – all reasons which motivate me to act exert their causal power only insofar as I “posit” or accept them as reasons ... One would think such implicit reflexivity is limited to conscious activity and is, as such, precisely that which our unconscious acts lack – when I act unconsciously, I act as if I follow a blind compulsion, as if I am submitted to a pseudo-natural causality. However, as we have already seen apropos the role of absentials, implicit reflexivity is for Lacan not only also discernible in the unconscious, it is precisely that which, at its most radical, *is* unconscious. Let us recall the typical attitude of a hysterical subject who complains how he is exploited, manipulated, victimized by others, reduced to an object of exchange – Lacan’s answer to this is that this subjective position of a passive victim of circumstances is never simply imposed from outside onto the subject but has to be at least minimally endorsed by him. The subject, of course, is not aware of his active participation in his own victimization – this, precisely, is the “unconscious” truth of the subject’s conscious experience of being a mere passive victim of circumstances.

One can see now in what precise psychoanalytical context Lacan’s apparently nonsensical thesis according to which the Cartesian *cogito* (or, rather, the Kantian Self-Consciousness) is the very subject of the Unconscious, is grounded: for Lacan, the “subject of the unconscious,” the subject to be attributed to the Freudian Unconscious, is precisely this empty point of self-relating, not a subject bursting with a wealth of libidinal forces and fantasies. This paradoxical identity of Self-Consciousness (in the precise sense that this term acquires in German Idealism) with the subject of the Unconscious becomes clear in the problematic of radical Evil, from Kant to Schelling: faced with the enigma of how it is that we hold an evil person responsible for his deeds (although it is clear to us that the propensity to Evil is part of this person’s “nature,” i.e. that he cannot but “follow his nature” and accomplish his deeds with an absolute necessity), Kant and Schelling postulate a non-phenomenal transcendental, atemporal act of primordial choice, by means of

which, each of us, prior to his temporal bodily existence, chooses his eternal character. Within our temporal phenomenal existence, this act of choice is experienced as an imposed necessity, which means that the subject, in his phenomenal self-awareness, is not conscious of the free choice which grounds his character (his ethical “nature”) – that is to say, this act is radically unconscious (the conclusion explicitly drawn by Schelling). We encounter here again the subject as the void of pure reflectivity, as that X to which one can attribute (as his free decision) what, in our phenomenal self-awareness, one experiences as part of our inherited or otherwise imposed nature. The conclusion to be drawn is thus, again, that Self-Consciousness itself is radically unconscious.

The standard topic of the contemporary anti-philosophy is anti-Cartesianism: the Cartesian *cogito* is an abstract rational entity artificially torn out of the concrete life-world of actual individuals. In this context, the Freudian Unconscious is perceived as part of the anti-Cartesian backlash, as yet another proof, in the line of Feuerbach, Marx, etc., that we humans are not isolated thinking beings but, as Heidegger would have put it, always-already thrown-into-the-world, engaged with reality. Lacan’s thesis that *cogito* is the Freudian subject acquires here its full weight: for him, on the contrary, the Unconscious is not part of the thick non-transparent background of the *Lebenswelt*. With regard to the opposition between abstract (decontextualized) rational structures and concrete thick life-world, the Unconscious is on the side of the first: the Unconscious is the intrusion of a foreign body into our life-world, it is like an intruding machine which derails the smooth functioning of our life-world, subordinating it to its own weird laws. Just think about what the Unconscious of drives does to our innate instinctual sexuality: it totally perverts it, subordinating its reproductive function to an almost suicidal mechanism of the compulsion-to-repeat in which enjoyment is posited as a self-goal. So, to conclude, let’s recall how MacGowan resumes the basic political lesson of Hegel’s dialectics:

The point of political contestation is to move in the direction of an increasingly resistant contradiction, and philosophy plays a vital role in this movement. This is Hegel’s definition of progress: the

movement from more easily resolved social contradictions to more intractable ones.<sup>[50](#)</sup>

In short, in a Hegelian reconciliation, the opposing forces of a conflict are not reunited in a higher non-antagonistic Whole; a Hegelian reconciliation is, at its most radical, the reconciliation with “contradiction” itself. In the concluding moment of a dialectical circular move, the contradiction that motivated this move is not abolished; it re-emerges in its purest and more radical form. Or, to use the standard terms never used by Hegel himself, in the final “synthesis” the anti-thesis is brought to an extreme, fully internalized as constitutive of the entity in question. (We should not be afraid to apply this on Marx’s notion of Communism: if the entire hitherto history is the history of class struggle, in Communism, “struggle” will erupt in a more radical form.) And does the prospect of Singularity not provide the ultimate example of this process? It will not be the immersion in a selfless collective thought but the experience of a radical gap or, rather, split: the subject will maintain a minimum of distance towards the collective thought, and this distance will be the source of a suffering whose contours we cannot guess today, but also the source of a new hope.

The answer to the question “will a subject survive the entry into Singularity?” does depend on our notion of subject. If we identify as the core of subjectivity its “inner life,” what we usually refer to as the inner wealth of a personality, its secret dreams, anxieties and hopes, then, of course, subject disappears in Singularity where all such content is “collectivized.” If, however, we identify subject as the void filled in by what Lacan refers to as the fantasmatic “stuff of the I” but not identical to it, then it is only in the passage through Singularity that a subject appears as reduced to its minimum, as the void of the Cartesian *cogito*. The loss of the loss itself, the appearance of the loss at its purest, is therefore something like a thinking version of Malevitch’s famous black square on a white surface: the zero-level, the marking of the basic coordinates of our symbolic space. It is important to note here that, for Malevitch, this zero-form is not some kind of self-destructive abyss we should beware of not being swallowed by it but a point through which we should pass to gain a

new beginning. It is the moment of death-drive which opens up the space for a new beginning. This is why Malevitch's later more figurative paintings (like his famous self-portrait) are not a betrayal of his youthful radicality but ways to explore the space opened up by it. (In the self-portrait, this fidelity is signaled by Malevitch's hands forming a square, telling the viewer that the square is still here.) And the same goes for our entry into Singularity: the loss of a loss brought by it could be a new beginning of something we cannot yet imagine.

So what will survive in Singularity, what will elude its space of shared collective experience? Two interdependent (non-)entities: the empty subject, a subject deprived of the wealth of its inner life, and its correlate, the virtual Unconscious. (Plus, if we follow our Beckettian speculation, the division between empty subject and the estranged thought-content of its inner life – the selfless collective thought the subject will no longer experience as “its own” – will inscribe itself into this thought itself as the division between hallucinatory collective trance and cold objective knowledge.) The persistence of the virtual Unconscious means that the empty subject will not be just a mute singular point at a distance from the collective substance of Singularity: the collective space of Singularity will be experienced as fractured, inconsistent, with another voice, the voice of unconscious counterfactuals, appearing in its cracks.<sup>[51](#)</sup>

In other words, what survives entry into Singularity is not the core of being-human but precisely the inhuman part or aspect of humanity, the Cartesian subject and the Unconscious. Descartes was the first anti-humanist thinker: his *cogito* should be strictly distinguished from what we call “human personality,” all the wealth of inner life. The high epoch of humanism was the Renaissance which celebrates human beings as the highest among all creatures, as a creature of expressivity creatively bringing out its inner depth, deploying its inner potentials. The Cartesian subject is quite another thing: an inhuman void, an empty point of self-relating negativity. What effectively is under threat from the wired brain is our ordinary self-experience as free human individuals with direct access to our inner life, but this threat, this dispossession of what we, in our daily



life, consider the staple of our personality, brings out the contours of our inhuman subjectivity.

So we should now, as in the final punchline of a joke, turn around our repeatedly raised question: will the eventual rise of a wired brain threaten the core of our being-human? We should replace it with the opposite question: will this eventual rise produce a new form of subjectivity? Will it render palpable a key dimension of subjectivity which, until now, has been obfuscated in our self-experience? Our answer is a cautious yes: what will become visible is the gap that separates the void of subjectivity from the so-called “inner world” of our personality, the gap that is invisible in our daily experience where we identify ourselves with our “inner life.”

This interconnection between the Cartesian subject and the Unconscious has two further crucial implications. First, even this “pure” subject (which survives the entry into Singularity) is not without object, it is constitutively correlated with an “impossible” object, what Lacan calls object small a. Second, this “pure” subject is also not neutral with regard to sexual difference but is constitutively sexed, traversed by the real of the impossibility of sexual relationship: subject is only subject insofar as it is curtailed (truncated, inhibited) by this impossibility, not neutral but always “partial” with regard to the choice imposed by sexual difference. Yes, subject is not object, it persists only insofar as it eludes any identification with some object; however, in the same way there is a difference between coffee-without-milk and plain coffee as coffee-without, a subject can be a subject without a determinate phallic object (male castration), or a subject which is just without (feminine). Or, to put it in a different way, while men sacrifice themselves for something (a higher cause: country, freedom, honor), only women are able to sacrifice themselves for *nothing*.

This paradox accounts for the gesture of feminine withdrawal at the very moment when “she could have it all (the longed-for partner)” in a series of novels from Madame de Lafayette’s *Princesse de Cleves* to Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* (or, the obverse/complementary case, the woman’s non-withdrawal, her inexplicable perseverance in the unhappy marriage, or with a no longer loved partner, even when the possibility arises to get out of it,

as in James's *The Portrait of a Lady*). Although ideology gets invested in this gesture of renunciation, the gesture itself is non-ideological. The reading of this gesture to be rejected is the standard psychoanalytic one according to which we are dealing with the hysterical logic of the object of love (the lover) who is desired only insofar as he is prohibited, only insofar as there is an obstacle in the guise of the husband – the moment the obstacle disappears, the woman loses interest in this love object. In addition to the hysterical economy of being able to enjoy the object only insofar as it remains illicit/prohibited, insofar as it maintains a potential status, i.e. in the guise of fantasies about what “might have” happened, this withdrawal (or insistence) can also be interpreted in a multitude of other ways: as the expression of so-called “feminine masochism” (which can be further read as an expression of the eternal feminine nature, or as the internalization of the patriarchal pressure) preventing a woman to fully “seize the day”; as a proto-feminist gesture of stepping out of the confines of phallic economy which posits as the woman's ultimate goal her happiness in a relationship with a man; etc. etc. However, all these interpretations seem to miss the point which consists in the absolutely fundamental nature of the gesture of withdrawal as constitutive of the subject herself. If, following the great German Idealists, we equate subject with freedom and autonomy, is such a gesture of withdrawal – not as a sacrificial gesture addressed at some version of the big Other, but as a gesture which provides its own satisfaction, as a gesture of finding *jouissance* in the very gap that separates me from the object – not the ultimate form of autonomy?

Back to our example of coffee without milk: if men are like coffee with milk/penis, women are not man without milk/penis, but they are also not just fully women. This is what Lacan aims at with his claim that *la femme n'existe pas*: although a woman is not defined by the negation of being-man, there is no substantial feminine identity. In his seminar on feminine sexuality, Lacan claims that, while man can be defined differentially, as not-woman, the obverse does not hold: woman cannot be defined as not-man. This does not mean that women possess a substantial identity outside relation to man: what characterizes a woman prior to the relation to man is rather a *no* as

such, a self-relating negativity, and man as not-woman means that man, in its very being, denies the *no* itself that defines feminine subjectivity, not that it negates some substantial feminine essence. Homologously, the status of “coffee without milk” implies that there is no simple positive “plain coffee” lacking nothing: “plain coffee” without a without is already in itself marked by negation, it is just that this negation is not yet a determinate negation.

With regard to the triad of man, woman, and human, one should bear in mind that both woman and human combine “man” with a prefix: “woman” joins “wife” (wife, female person) to man, so that it means something like “wife-man,” and “human” means “of or belonging to man.”<sup>52</sup> One should thus reject the common notion that the genus of humans is divided into species of men and women: the underlying logic is more that of the genus “men” divided into species “humans” and “women” since “hu (of)” and “wo (wife)” are the two specifications of “man.” There are men who are fully human, “of man,” and there are men who are obviously not fully “of man,” and the prefix “wo” indexes this deprivation. So what should the feminist answer to this distortion be? Not, as it may appear, to essentialize femininity as a generic term and to reduce “man” to its deficient species, but rather to elevate deficiency itself into a basic constitutive feature of being-human, and to conceive the masculine position as an obfuscation of this constitutive deficiency.

It is this constitutive deficiency which is threatened by the wired brain – when my brain is wired, I no longer need to make external bodily movements (typing, talking) to interact with the machine. This fact radically changes the status of the interface defined as “a shared boundary across which two or more separate components of a computer system exchange information. The exchange can be between software, computer hardware, peripheral devices, humans, and combinations of these.”<sup>53</sup> With projects like the already-mentioned AlterEgo, the interface which enables me to communicate with the machine is no longer a screen outside me: *my mind directly functions as the interface between me and the machine*. I have thus in principle no place to hide, no distance from machine: I am thoroughly exposed to the machine.<sup>54</sup>

To clarify this point, let's make a detour and elevate into a concept the notion of "glory hole" (a hole in a wall, or other partition, often between public lavatory cubicles or adult video arcade booths and lounges, for people to engage in sexual activity). Although glory holes are mostly associated with gay culture and anal or oral sex, they are also used by bisexual or heterosexual people – large holes into which a woman can put the lower half of her body in order to get penetrated anonymously. The function of a glory hole is double: it maintains the anonymity of the partners of sexual exchange, plus it depersonalizes my partner, reducing him/her to a partial object (I only play with penis with testicles, anal opening, or vagina). Some queer theorists point out the liberating aspect of such depersonalization; however, one should insist here on the distinction between person and subject: while such anonymous sex depersonalizes (deprives my partner of his/her status as a personality), it does NOT deprive him/her of subjectivity – it precisely reduces the other to a pure subject deprived of his/her personality. When I engage in a sexual activity through a glory hole, I acquire a kind of distance from what goes on on the other side of the hole, I am not fully in it, I am reduced to an empty observer of what goes on out there, and this distance sets me free from my personality and reduces me to a subject. For a Lacanian, it is easy to see the link between this depersonalization and the reduction of the body to a partial organ which enjoys through the hole: a person is a correlate to the entire body, it is like the soul, the inner wealth of a body, while subject is correlated to a partial object – or, as Lacan wrote it in his formula of the fantasy,  $\$ - a$ . The wall in which the glory hole gapes is thus the wall that separates person from subject: let's say I am the one who pushes my penis and testicles through the hole so that the one on the other side can play with it – on this (my) side of the wall I am a person with a body, on the other side I am a subject appended to a partial organ my anonymous partner is playing with (masturbating or sucking it, pushing it into his/her anus or vagina ...). The paradox here is that my "true self" is not this side of the hole, while on the other side I only play a game – on the contrary, the fantasmatic core of my subjectivity is out there on the other side, so that in some sense I am more "truly myself" in the sexual interplay

that goes on out there (and where I am reduced to a partial object) than I am as a person this side of the wall. In this precise sense, we can also say that the hole is an interface of the two different dimensions, my reality on this side and the fantasmatic real on the other side. The key feature of glory holes is the wall which functions as the frontier separating two different spaces, my personal reality and the real on the other side where I play out my fantasies. Glory holes here just provide a particular case of the division which is at work in every form of reality – reality is never “all,” it is always curtailed by some form of a wall that excludes from it the real. With regard to our topic – wired brain in which my mind itself directly serves as the interface – the question is, of course: what happens in this case when there is no wall separating my reality from the fantasmatic real? There is only one answer: a kind of psychotic short-circuit in which reality and fantasy directly coincide – another dystopian vision of a catastrophe...

However, as we have already seen, this is not the whole story. Back to Musk's idea that, if we don't join the supermind of the new Artificial Intelligence, we – humans – will soon become like gorillas in a zoo: but what if this prospect of somehow remaining-outside has its own advantages? Not in the sense that we'll enjoy a new stupid ignorant existence in our zoo, being taken care of by the benevolent AI, but in a much more radical sense: if we assume that the eventual space of Singularity will not be an omnipotent single space controlling it all but an inconsistent mixture, will our (partial) exclusion from it not provide for a minimum of freedom, of playing with different aspects of the multifaceted Singularity? In a joke about Auschwitz that circulates among Jews, a group of them who were burned in the camp sit at a bench in Paradise and talk about their suffering, making fun of it. One of them says: “David, you remember how you slipped on the way to the gas chamber and died before the gas even engulfed you?”, etc. Strolling around in Paradise, god himself comes by, listens to them and complains that he doesn't get the joke; one of the Jews steps towards him, puts a hand on his shoulder and comforts him: “Don't be sad. You were not there, so of course you cannot get the joke!” The beauty of this reply resides in the way it refers to the well-known statement that god died in

Auschwitz, that there was no god there: “no god in Auschwitz” does not imply that god cannot understand the horror of what went on there (god can do that easily, it’s his job to do it), but that he cannot understand the humor generated by the experience of Auschwitz. What god doesn’t (and cannot) get is the obscene sovereignty of the human spirit which reacts with laughter to the very space where he (god) is absent. Replace god with Singularity and, maybe, this is our position in Singularity.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. G.W.F. Hegel, "Preface" to *The Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, quoted from [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/preface.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/preface.htm).
2. In what follows, I summarize my approach to Hegel developed in detail in a series of my most recent books, especially in *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, London: Bloomsbury Press 2019.
3. See Paul M. Livingston, *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism*, New York: Routledge 2012.
4. There is nothing anti-leftist about such a stance of final doom – one can even argue that all authentic leftists subscribe to it. In rock music, the ultimate expression of this stance was provided by "The Weaver's Answer," a song by the English Trotskyite band Family. The song, released as a single in 1969, describes the view upon a subject's life from the standpoint of the "weaver" (fate, death), where even a happy family life ends up in loneliness and despair. The true genius of Family becomes evident when we compare "The Weaver's Answer" with "Good News Bad News," the first song of their next album *Anyway* (1970). This song takes over the first melodic motif of "The Weaver's Answer," but it cuts this motif short while the words engage in a desperate questioning of the existing political order, like "why change the rules / say those on the top / to those at the bottom / caught looking up." This cutting short of the melodic line nicely renders the interruption, the violent outburst which prevents the formulation of a full statement of wisdom (about the ultimate vanity of life). This, of course, in no way implies there is room only for bitterness and rage in Family's songs: their biggest hit "No Mule's Fool" is a wonderful portrait of a boy's happy coexistence with his lazy mule. The three songs together thus provide a consistent triad of moments of ordinary happiness, the universalization of these particular moments of happiness into a basic doom of life, and, finally, singular moments of desperate resistance to doom and oppression.
5. One can note here a paradox in Livingston's description of Badiou's theoretical edifice: although, according to Livingston, Badiou opts for consistency instead of totality, his vision is not that the universe is an inconsistent mess in which only local consistent spaces emerge: insofar as we conceive Being as "all there is" (and in this sense a totality), this totality is consistent (as described in Badiou's ontology) - inconsistency emerges only through rare eventual exceptions.
6. In *Le Monde*, January 29, 2015.
7. See [www.pressenza.com/2019/08/pia-klemp-refuses-the-grand-vermeil-medal/](http://www.pressenza.com/2019/08/pia-klemp-refuses-the-grand-vermeil-medal/)



[awarded-to-her-by-the-city-of-paris/](#).

8. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AlterEgo>.
9. See [www.fastcompany.com/90350006/watch-this-device-translate-silent-thoughts-into-speech](http://www.fastcompany.com/90350006/watch-this-device-translate-silent-thoughts-into-speech).
10. In a private conversation.
11. See Jean-Pierre Dupuy's contribution in *Le Débat*, no. 129 (March–April 2004), quoted from Jean-Michel Besnier, *Demain les posthumains* (Paris: Fayard 2012), 195.
12. Gunther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (The outdatedness of human beings) (Munich: Beck 1956).
13. Facebook is now building its own mind-reading device, and asked about the privacy implications of the technology, Mark Zuckerberg said: "Presumably this would be something that someone would choose to use." (Quoted from [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/01/future-imperfect-robots-mind-reading-apps](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/01/future-imperfect-robots-mind-reading-apps).) Really? Presumed by whom? By the secret agencies reading my mind? So if they will probe my mind without asking me and their mind-reading will tell them I don't want it to happen, they will politely disconnect? Although wired brain experiments are now still rather rudimentary and effectively demand the subject's willing participation, ethical dilemmas are already emerging – see [www.theguardian.com/science/2019/sep/22/brain-computer-interface-implants-neuralink-braingate-elon-musk](http://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/sep/22/brain-computer-interface-implants-neuralink-braingate-elon-musk).
14. I rely here on Jan de Vos who raises this question in his path-breaking work on the digital death drive (manuscript).
15. Quoted from [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/sep/07/pentagon-military-artificial-intelligence-ethicist](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/sep/07/pentagon-military-artificial-intelligence-ethicist).
16. This triple structure is elaborated in detail by Gabriel Tupinamba in *The Desire of Psychoanalysis* (to appear with Northwestern University Press).

## 1 The Digital Police State

1. See Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow*, London: Harvill Secker 2016.
2. Harari, op. cit., p. 338.
3. Op. cit., p. 396.
4. Op. cit., p. 305.
5. Op. cit., ibid.
6. Op. cit., p. 306.
7. Op. cit., p. 311.
8. Op. cit., p. 397.
9. Op. cit., p. 273.

10. Op. cit., p. 346.
11. Quoted from [https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/07/31/inenglish/1564561365\\_256842.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/07/31/inenglish/1564561365_256842.html).
12. J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 262–263.
13. Quoted from Zdravko Kobe, “The Interface of the Universal: On Hegel’s Concept of the Police,” available online at <http://journal.institfdt.bg.ac.rs/index.php?journal=fid&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=728&path%5B%5D=624>.
14. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press 1977, p. 148.
15. G.W.F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, p. 22.
16. Kobe, op. cit.
17. Hegel, op. cit., pp. 17-18.
18. Hegel, op. cit., p. 23.
19. Kobe, op. cit.
20. Quoted from [www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jan/20/shoshana-zuboff-age-of-surveillance-capitalism-google-facebook](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jan/20/shoshana-zuboff-age-of-surveillance-capitalism-google-facebook).

## 2 The Idea of a Wired Brain and its Limitations

1. Non-attributed quotes that follow are from <https://waitbutwhy.com/2017/04/neuralink.html>.
2. Quoted from [www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/04/10/mind-outside-head-consciousness/](http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/04/10/mind-outside-head-consciousness/). See the systematic presentation of Manzotti’s position in Tim Parks, *Out of my Head: On the Trail of Consiousness*, London: Harvill Secker 2018.
3. I developed this model in Theorem III of my *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, London: Bloomsbury 2019.
4. In a limited way, this can already be done: “Doctors have turned the brain signals for speech into written sentences in a research project that aims to transform how patients with severe disabilities communicate in the future. The breakthrough is the first to demonstrate how the intention to say specific words can be extracted from brain activity and converted into text rapidly enough to keep pace with natural conversation.”(Quoted from [www.theguardian.com/science/2019/jul/30/neuroscientists-decode-brain-speech-signals-into-actual-sentences](http://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/jul/30/neuroscientists-decode-brain-speech-signals-into-actual-sentences).)
5. Summarized from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bezhin\\_Meadow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bezhin_Meadow).
6. Quoted from [www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a29472259/succession-season-2-finale-ending-logan-smile-explained/](http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a29472259/succession-season-2-finale-ending-logan-smile-explained/).
7. Does something similar not happen at the end of the psychoanalytic treatment? Does

the analyst also not have to organize a way that his patient will “kill him,” i.e., break out of the transference to the analyst, get rid of him without feeling indebted to him? Such a sacrifice is something that Stalinism, with all its obsession with sacrificing oneself for the Party, cannot afford.

8. Quoted from [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/pinkard-translation-of-phenomenology.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/pinkard-translation-of-phenomenology.pdf).
9. See [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/04/paralysed-man-walks-using-mind-controlled-exoskeleton?CMP=fb\\_gu&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook#Echobox=1570182539](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/04/paralysed-man-walks-using-mind-controlled-exoskeleton?CMP=fb_gu&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook#Echobox=1570182539).
10. Michael E. Zimmerman, “The Singularity: A Crucial Phase in Divine Self-Actualization?”, available <http://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/107/213>.

### 3 The Impasse of Soviet Tech-Gnosis

1. Quoted from Orlando Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, London: Allen Lane 2001, p. 447.
2. Figes, op. cit., p. 464.
3. See Jacques Lacan, *Television*, New York journal, October 40 (1987).
4. The main work of Nicolas Malebranche is *Recherches de la vérité* (1674-75, the most available edition, Paris: Vrin 1975).
5. Quoted from Maria Chehonadskih, “Soviet Epistemologies and the Materialist Ontology of Poor Life: Andrei Platonov, Alexander Bogdanov and Lev Vygotsky,” (unpublished manuscript). This chapter is heavily indebted to Chehonadskih’s work – all non-accredited quotes that follow are from it.
6. Surprisingly (or perhaps not), we find a distant echo of this cosmic vision of Communism, inclusive of the “construction of god,” in Huey Newton, the founder and main theorist of the Black Panther Party: “I like to think that we will finally move to a stage called ‘godliness,’ where man will know the secrets of the beginning and the end and will have full control of the universe —and when I say the universe, I mean all motion and matter.” (*The Huey P. Newton Reader*, New York and Oakland: Seven Stories Press 2002, p. 189.)

### 4 Singularity

1. The fact of one event influencing another “directly,” at a distance, somehow bypassing the spatio-temporal coordinates, almost spontaneously leads us to assume that the discrete material reality is not all, that there has to be a higher level of direct spiritual contact. For a strict materialist, the way to avoid this spiritualist temptation is to relativize space itself: phenomena of “synchronicity” demonstrate that our spatio-temporal coordinates are not a kind of Kantian a priori frame of reality, that spatial

distances can be “shortened” in a different constellation of the quantum waves that constitute our ultimate reality.

2. Michael E. Zimmerman, “The Singularity: A Crucial Phase in Divine Self-Actualization?,” available at <http://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/107/213> Non-attributed quotes that follow are from this essay.
3. Quoted from Zimmerman, op. cit.
4. So where should today's Hegelians locate the final moment of history? There is a comical supplement to Hegel's idea that historical progress moves from the East to the West, culminating in Western European modernity. Could we not say that, in the twentieth century, the center of history moved further West, to the United States, where it also moved from the East to the West, from New York to California? (We leave aside here the “St Louis Hegelians,” the first US Hegelian school from the second half of the nineteenth century: they perceived the development of the US as the move from the East Coast to the center which, they hoped, would be St Louis, and one can imagine their disappointment when they saw Chicago quickly surpass St Louis ...) And that in recent decades progress seems to have moved even further West, crossing the Pacific, culminating first in Japan and now in China – but since China is where, for Hegel, history begins, the circle is thus closed, the end joins the beginning in what cannot but appear a gigantic historical Moebius strip.
5. Cadell Last, personal communication.
6. See Adrian Johnston, “Divine Ignorance: Jacques Lacan and Christian Atheism” (unpublished manuscript). Non-accredited quotes that follow are from this text.
7. See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, New York: Norton 1999, p. 74.
8. Adrian Johnston, “Lacan's Endgame: Philosophy, Science, and Religion in the Final Seminars,” *Crisis and Critique*, special issue “Lacan,” 2019.
9. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, p. 315.

## 5 The Fall that Makes Us Like God

1. Quoted from [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/23/elon-musk-neuralink-chip-brain-implants-humanity](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/23/elon-musk-neuralink-chip-brain-implants-humanity).
2. Quoted from op. cit.
3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, London: Macmillan 1956, pp. 152–153.
4. Quoted from [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/nietzsche/1886/beyond-good-evil/](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/nietzsche/1886/beyond-good-evil/).
5. See <https://in.mashable.com/culture/2054/indian-man-who-wants-to-sue-his-parents-for-giving-birth-to>.
6. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977, p. 129.
7. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Religion II*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 1969, p. 206.

8. Op. cit., p. 207.
9. Op. cit., p. 205.
10. Quoted from <https://news.yahoo.com/dare-greta-thunberg-asks-world-leaders-un-152546818.html>.
11. I owe this formulation to Dave Harvilicz, Los Angeles.
12. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 21.
13. G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Part I: Logic, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982, p. 286 (§ 212).
14. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 297.
15. There is probably no book of mine in which I do not refer to this image at least once.
16. See Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs*, New York: Vintage Books 1992.
17. See [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/25/woman-93-arrested-as-a-dying-wish-after-being-good-all-her-life](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/25/woman-93-arrested-as-a-dying-wish-after-being-good-all-her-life).
18. One can, of course, also read *Joker* in the opposite sense and claim that the act that constitutes the main figure as “Joker” is an autonomous act by means of which he surpasses the objective circumstances of his situation. He identifies himself with his fate, but this identification is a free act, i.e., in it, he posits himself as a unique figure of subjectivity ... However, such a reading runs against the spirit of the film.

## 6 Reflexivity of the Unconscious

1. Quoted from Tupinamba, op. cit.
2. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press 1994, pp. 104–105.
3. Quoted from <https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/captive-state-review-1203164121/>.
4. Işık Barış Fidaner, personal communication.
5. In a private communication.
6. Robert Brandom, *The Spirit of Trust*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2019, p. 20.
7. When Hegel claims that self-consciousness is the truth of consciousness, does this not imply that normativity is the hidden foundation of factuality, not the other – reductionist – way around? It is thus not enough to oppose the non-normative world of objective reality and the subjective deontic universe of values and commitments: at a certain basic level, their distinction disappears. For a vulgar materialist, the distinction disappears when we account for the emergence of the normative dimension out of a complex process taking place in objective reality (when we deduce the Ought from the Is), while as true dialecticians we have to assume that every (vision of) objective reality remains irreducibly normative: reality is not a simple fact but something that has to rely on the symbolic normativity. This is how Lacan read Aristotelian ontology, more precisely, his definition of essence, *to ti ēn einai*: its

literal translation “the what-it-was-to-be” implies a Master’s gesture, it is “the what-has-to-be.” And does Hegel not point in the same direction when he opposes the standard notion of truth as *adaequatio intellectus ad rem* to the higher notion of truth as the adequacy of the thing itself to its notion? Does this higher notion of truth not imply a deontic dimension in the thing itself which is not just what it is but has to be measured by an immanent normative standard? A table is not just a table, it can also be to a different degree “a true table,” a table adequate to its notion – a table that is unstable and crooked is not a true table.

## 7 A Literary Fantasy

- [1.](#) English translations of the three key lectures of this seminar are available in *lacanian ink 50* (New York 2017).
- [2.](#) Jacques-Alain Miller, quoted from *lacanian ink 50*, p. 29.
- [3.](#) Miller, op. cit., p. 31.
- [4.](#) Incidentally, Miller is totally wrong when he claims that this search for the pure real “led Lacan to the same zone as *Oedipus at Colonus*, where one finds the absolute absence of charity, of fraternity, of any human sentiment: this is where the search for the real stripped of meaning leads us” – but does *Oedipus at Colonus* really stand for such “real stripped of meaning”? The dying Oedipus is definitely not characterized by the “absolute absence of any human sentiment” – on the contrary, he pursues a very “human” goal, carefully calculating whom his approaching death will hurt and whom it will help. He chooses to die close to Athens so that his Thebes will be deprived of the benefits that come from being the place of his death.
- [5.](#) Miller, op. cit., p. 120.
- [6.](#) Op. cit., p. 121.
- [7.](#) Op. cit., p. 125.
- [8.](#) I rely here on Anthony Uhlmann, “The same and the other: Beckett’s *The unnameable*, Derrida and Levinas,” *Law Text Culture* 3/1997, pp. 127–147. Available online at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol3/iss1/9>.
- [9.](#) Private conversation.
- [10.](#) Gilles Deleuze, “The Exhausted,” in *Substance: A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism* 78 (Vol. 24 No. 3), 1995, p. 7.
- [11.](#) Uhlmann, op. cit.
- [12.](#) Op. cit.
- [13.](#) *The Beckett Trilogy*, London: Picador 1979, p. 317.
- [14.](#) Op. cit., p. 283.
- [15.](#) Op. cit., p. 336.
- [16.](#) Op. cit., p. 352.
- [17.](#) Op. cit., p. 275.

- [18.](#) See Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma*, Paris: Cahiers du Cinema 1982.
- [19.](#) Uhlmann, op. cit.
- [20.](#) See Alenka Zupančič, "Oedipus or the Excrement of the Signifier," in *Ojdip v Kolonu* (in Slovene), Ljubljana: Analecta 2018.
- [21.](#) Zupančič, op. cit., p. 154.
- [22.](#) Op. cit., p. 171.
- [23.](#) See Jean-Joseph Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993.
- [24.](#) See Giorgio de Santillana and Herta von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill*, Boston: Nonpareil Books 2014.
- [25.](#) Quoted from <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/colonus.html>.
- [26.](#) One can easily imagine a similar tasteless propaganda clip mobilizing the fact that, in Southern Slavic languages, the vulgar term for fellatio is "smoking a prick." So instead of the usual cigarette packages with photos depicting horrors of illnesses caused by smoking, there could be a photo of an attractive woman's face with her lips sucking a penis, with the inscription in large letters: "Smoke a prick, not a cigarette! It is much healthier!" The accompanying TV propaganda clips should show a "serious" doctor explaining with charts why fellatio is better than smoking: a swallowed sperm is not in any way dangerous for our health but has many good vitamins ...
- [27.](#) See Mladen Dolar, "Oedipus at Colonus," in *Ojdip v Kolonu* (in Slovene), Ljubljana. Analecta 2018.
- [28.](#) Jaques-Alain Miller, "Un reel pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> siecle," in *Un reel pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> siecle*, Paris: Scilicet 2013. English translation available at [www.congresamp2014.com/en/template.php?file=Textos/Presentation-du-theme\\_Jacques-Alain-Miller.html](http://www.congresamp2014.com/en/template.php?file=Textos/Presentation-du-theme_Jacques-Alain-Miller.html).
- [29.](#) Miller, op. cit.
- [30.](#) I rely here on Alenka Zupančič, *Why Psychoanalysis?*, Uppsala; NSU Press 2008.
- [31.](#) See Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies*, New York: Zero Books 2017.
- [32.](#) When Trump was elected president, I was asked by a couple of publishers to write a book which would submit the Trump phenomenon to a psychoanalytic critique, and my answer was that we do not need psychoanalysis to explore the "pathology" of Trump's success – the only thing to psychoanalyze is the irrational stupidity of the left-liberal reactions to it, the stupidity which makes it more and more probable that Trump will be reelected. To use what is perhaps the lowest point of Trump's vulgarities, the left has not yet learned how to grab Trump by his p...
- [33.](#) Quoted from [www.nationalreview.com/2016/03/donald-trump-hegel-sartre-explain-trump-rise/](http://www.nationalreview.com/2016/03/donald-trump-hegel-sartre-explain-trump-rise/).

## A Treatise on Digital Apocalypse



1. Quoted from [www.e-flux.com/journal/97/251199/apocalypse-without-kingdom/](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/97/251199/apocalypse-without-kingdom/).
2. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *La guerre qui ne peut pas avoir lieu: Essai de métaphysique nucléaire*, Paris: Desclee de Brouwer 2019.
3. Dupuy, op. cit., p. 79.
4. Op. cit., p. 61.
5. Op. cit., p. 139.
6. Todd MacGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel*, New York: Columbia University Press 2019, p. 53.
7. Quoted from [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf).
8. This option was explored by Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2016.
9. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Petite métaphysique des tsunamis*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 2005, p. 19.
10. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *La guerre qui ne peut pas avoir lieu*, p. 205.
11. Dupuy, op. cit., pp. 207–208.
12. Op. cit., p. 177.
13. Op. cit., p. 199.
14. Quoted from [www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/ramaphosa-must-explain-comment-of-white-people-and](http://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/ramaphosa-must-explain-comment-of-white-people-and). Plus there is another problem: Ramaphosa is one of the wealthiest South African businessmen, worth more than half a billion US dollars. So if we are talking about redistributing wealth, should he not also be thrown into the pot to boil slowly? (Or do we only aim at replacing the old white with the new black ruling class, with the black majority stuck in same poverty?)
15. One can, of course, adopt a distanced view, focusing on large epochs of our Earth and claim that, even if humanity does cause the destruction of most of life on the planet, this will be, for someone exploring the Earth a million years from now, a minor catastrophe comparable to the one that caused the extinction of dinosaurs. Is the idea of Anthropocene as a new geological epoch not then a case of human arrogance, of overblowing our importance? See [www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/08/arrogance-anthropocene/595795](http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/08/arrogance-anthropocene/595795).
16. We can, of course, also imagine a religious-fundamentalist positive stance towards a nuclear apocalypse: we don't have to fear it because for us, true believers, it will not be the end but a new beginning – god will take us into his kingdom.
17. MacGowan, op. cit., p. 212.
18. Incidentally, Mao emphatically insists that contradictions are eternal, that they will be there also in Communism, but does this make it any better?
19. It is easy to note how this opposition echoes the two opposite ways to conceive the notion of (symbolic) castration: the negative one, where castration designates an oppressive obstacle which we should abolish in order to release subject's creative productivity; and the positive one, where castration designates the obstacle (or loss) which opens up and sustains the very domain it prevents access to, so that by



abolishing castration we lose the thing we wanted to save. The paradox of castration is this forced choice: the desired Thing can be approached only in a curtailed form; if you want it all, you lose it all.

- [20.](#) See Alexander Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1987.
- [21.](#) And is it not similar with Hegel? In the accounts of the history of philosophy, he appears as a kind of missing link, a mediator, a point of passage, between the pre-transcendental metaphysics exploring the rational structure of the universe and the nineteenth century anti-metaphysical evolutionist historicism; however, upon a closer look it becomes clear that his thought is in excess with regard to what comes before and after it – in Hegel's thought, something becomes visible which gets immediately occluded in the post-Hegelian thought.
- [22.](#) See Harari, op. cit., p. 396.
- [23.](#) Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One. The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: MIT 2004, p. 620.
- [24.](#) Metzinger, op. cit., p. 621.
- [25.](#) Samo Tomšič, *The Labour of Enjoyment*, Berlin: August Verlag 2019. Numbers in brackets refer to the pages of this book.
- [26.](#) Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, New York: Norton 2006, p. 686.
- [27.](#) Quoted from [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/pinkard-translation-of-phenomenology.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/pinkard-translation-of-phenomenology.pdf).
- [28.](#) The term was elaborated by Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan*, London: Verso Books, 2015.
- [29.](#) Quoted from [www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-sept-26-2019-1.5297326/a-simple-clear-case-why-edward-snowden-thinks-u-s-congress-will-support-the-trump-ukraine-whistleblower-1.5297327](http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-sept-26-2019-1.5297326/a-simple-clear-case-why-edward-snowden-thinks-u-s-congress-will-support-the-trump-ukraine-whistleblower-1.5297327).
- [30.](#) Quoted from <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/23/politics/bernie-sanders-impeachment-cnn-town-hall/index.html>.
- [31.](#) See See Todd MacGowan, *Capitalism and Desire*, Cambridge UP 2016.
- [32.](#) Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, New York: Norton 1998, p. 275.
- [33.](#) I summarize here my detailed reading of the film – see “The Matrix, or the Two Sides of Perversion,” in [www.lacan.com/zizek-matrix.htm](http://www.lacan.com/zizek-matrix.htm).
- [34.](#) Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, London: Penguin 1990, p. 919.
- [35.](#) Maurizio Lazzarato, *Gouverner par la dette*, Paris: Les prairies ordinaires 2012, p. 10.
- [36.](#) Gerard Lebrun, *L'envers de la dialectique. Hegel à la lumière de Nietzsche*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 2004, p. 311.
- [37.](#) Quoted from [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch04.htm).
- [38.](#) Freud claimed that at the end of analysis the subject's pathological self-sabotage (in which we find enjoyment) is replaced by (our acceptance of) the common misery

which we have to confront as a libidinally indifferent fact, i.e., as our lot. The demand for a distance between the digital Other in its stupidity of a blind machine and the aura of a secret Master that clings to it is thus another example of how we should interrupt the short-circuit between the structure of external reality (and its limitations) and the real-impossible that pertains to our psychic life.

- [39.](#) Jacques Lacan, *L'angoisse*, unpublished seminar, lecture from the May 13, 1963.
- [40.](#) Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, Cambridge: MIT Press 2003, p. 192.
- [41.](#) I rely here on Alenka Zupančič, "Greta," *Delo*, Ljubljana, September 28, 2019, p. 7 (in Slovene).
- [42.](#) Quoted from [www.thelocal.it/20190419/were-not-here-for-selfies-greta-thunberg-takes-on-the-italian-government](http://www.thelocal.it/20190419/were-not-here-for-selfies-greta-thunberg-takes-on-the-italian-government).
- [43.](#) Fredric Jameson gave a hint in this direction when he pointed out that envy will re-emerge as a central issue in a Communist society.
- [44.](#) See [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7418059/Australian-porn-star-Tyi-Starr-sell-video-showing-GIVING-BIRTH.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7418059/Australian-porn-star-Tyi-Starr-sell-video-showing-GIVING-BIRTH.html).
- [45.](#) Peter Sloterdijk, "Warten auf den Islam," *Focus* 10/2006, p. 84.
- [46.](#) Tupinamba, op. cit.
- [47.](#) Todd MacGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel*, p. 138.
- [48.](#) Op. cit., ibid.
- [49.](#) Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, London: Penguin Books 2007, p. 871.
- [50.](#) MacGowan, op. cit., p. 212.
- [51.](#) However, insofar as the Unconscious eludes the space of Singularity, the question emerges: is this Unconscious only the Unconscious of a singular subject which also eludes Singularity, or can we talk about a "collective" Unconscious, not in the Jungian sense but in the sense of a virtual texture that dwells in the space between being and non-being, persisting there and leaving its traces in reality although present nowhere in it? The answer to this question relies on the answer to another one: what form of the (symbolic-virtual) "big Other" survives our entry into Singularity?
- [52.](#) See [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com).
- [53.](#) See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interface\\_\(computing\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interface_(computing)).
- [54.](#) For an indication of how Neuralink plans to do it, see "Elon Musk unveils Neuralink's plans for brain-reading 'threads' and a robot to insert them," in [www.theverge.com/2019/7/16/20697123/elon-musk-neuralink-brain-reading-thread-robot](http://www.theverge.com/2019/7/16/20697123/elon-musk-neuralink-brain-reading-thread-robot). Plus see, among many reports, "A Direct Brain-to-Brain Interface in Humans" – here is the abstract: "We describe the first direct brain-to-brain interface in humans and present results from experiments involving six different subjects. Our non-invasive interface, demonstrated originally in August 2013, combines electroencephalography (EEG) for recording brain signals with transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) for delivering information to the brain. We illustrate our method using a visuomotor task in which two humans must cooperate through direct brain-to-brain communication to achieve a desired goal in a computer game. The brain-to-brain interface detects motor imagery in EEG signals recorded from one subject (the

‘sender’) and transmits this information over the internet to the motor cortex region of a second subject (the ‘receiver’). This allows the sender to cause a desired motor response in the receiver (a press on a touchpad) via TMS. We quantify the performance of the brain-to-brain interface in terms of the amount of information transmitted as well as the accuracies attained in (1) decoding the sender’s signals, (2) generating a motor response from the receiver upon stimulation, and (3) achieving the overall goal in the cooperative visuomotor task. Our results provide evidence for a rudimentary form of direct information transmission from one human brain to another using non-invasive means” (<https://interestingengineering.com/brainnet-is-the-worlds-first-non-invasive-brain-to-brain-interface>).

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